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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEANING AND CRISIS: A CASE STUDY APPROACH

by

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GLEN MURRAY EDWARDS

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Date May 20, 1982

To my Grandmother

for her courage, caring and strength

ABSTRACT

The relationship between meaning and crisis has been explored in both psychology and philosophy. Frankl (1963), a psychiatrist, believes that man's primary motivation is to find personal meaning in his existence, a reason to live. He says that crisis can be a vehicle for increased meaning. Others such as Dabrowski (1964), another psychiatrist, go even further to suggest that crisis is essential to growth. Yet not everyone experiences increased meaning through crisis. For some, crisis has the effect of leading to increased despair. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between crisis and a deepened sense of meaning, and to identify themes that appear to differentiate between individuals who experience deepened meaning and those who do not.

Forty graduate students in The Faculty of Education were given Crumbaugh and Maholick's (1969) Purpose in Life (PIL) Test and Holmes' (1981) Schedule of Recent Experience (SRE). Because of lack of significant results and and ambiguity of subject response on the SRE, only the PIL was used to select 10 individuals for in-depth interviews. Individuals scoring highest and lowest on meaning were interviewed in a semi-structured format designed to elicit information relevant to the relationship between meaning and crisis.

The results of this study showed that crisis was an opportunity for a deepened sense of meaning but not a guarantee. Some individuals experienced a deepened sense of meaning through crisis, and others were either relatively unaffected by crisis or experienced the effects of crisis as leading to increased meaninglessness and despair.

Several themes emerged which appeared to distinguish individuals who experience deepened meaning from those who do not. The degree to which meaning is experienced appeared to be related to the presence of support systems and the degree to which an individual has a sense of personal control and perceives the freedom to choose among alternatives. The presence of high self-esteem and the ability for self-transcendence were also observed to be important in this regard. It was concluded that people differ in these resources and in their levels of sensitivity, and therefore in their ability to achieve comparable levels of meaning. Implied in this is the belief that some levels of meaning are more profound than other more superficial levels of meaning. Implications for the counselling process and for future research were discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Study

The question of "meaning" is a recurrent theme in philosophy and more recently in psychology. Frankl (1963, 1969, 1973, 1975, 1978) is a psychiatrist who has focused much of his career on developing his thesis that an individual's main task in life is to face personally the question of meaning. In this vein, Frankl often quotes Nietzsche: "He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how" (in Frankl, 1963, p. 164). This view of meaning can be contrasted with the view of Albert Camus who espouses meaninglessness: "I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it" (in Bierman & Gould, 1970, p. 577).

Some psychiatrists (Dabrowski, 1964; Frankl, 1963) hold the belief that man can face questions of meaning and existence through experiences of disruption and sometimes suffering. A related philosophical view says that joy cannot be known without having known sadness and despair. That is, it is only through crisis that people face questions of ultimate importance (Hebblethwaite, 1976). Both views imply that finding meaning involves change. To some, crisis provides the impetus for and even the substance of this change. This disruptive nature of crisis necessitates adaptation, a restructuring of ways of coping and seeing the world. As such, it can act as a catalyst providing an opportunity for people to question old beliefs and be challenged to new ones.

Conversely, the effects of crisis can be destructive. Not everyone experiences increased meaning through crisis. Crisis seems to debilitate and bring increased despair to some individuals.

These discussions generate numerous questions important to the therapist. His or her approach will be influenced by his/her belief system regarding meaning, crisis and their relationship. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between meaning and crisis, on which there appears to be little empirical research.

Research Questions

General Research Question

What is the relationship between crisis and a deepened sense of meaning?

Specific Questions

1. How do people define and experience meaning?
2. What, if any, identifiable themes emerge that distinguish individuals who experience meaning from those who do not?

3. What do individuals see as contributing to their experience of meaning and/or meaninglessness?
4. How do people define and experience crisis?
5. Is the outcome of crisis more often positive in the sense of increased meaning or negative in that it brings with it decreased meaning, emptiness and despair?

Conceptual Diagram

A conceptual diagram of related questions is included.

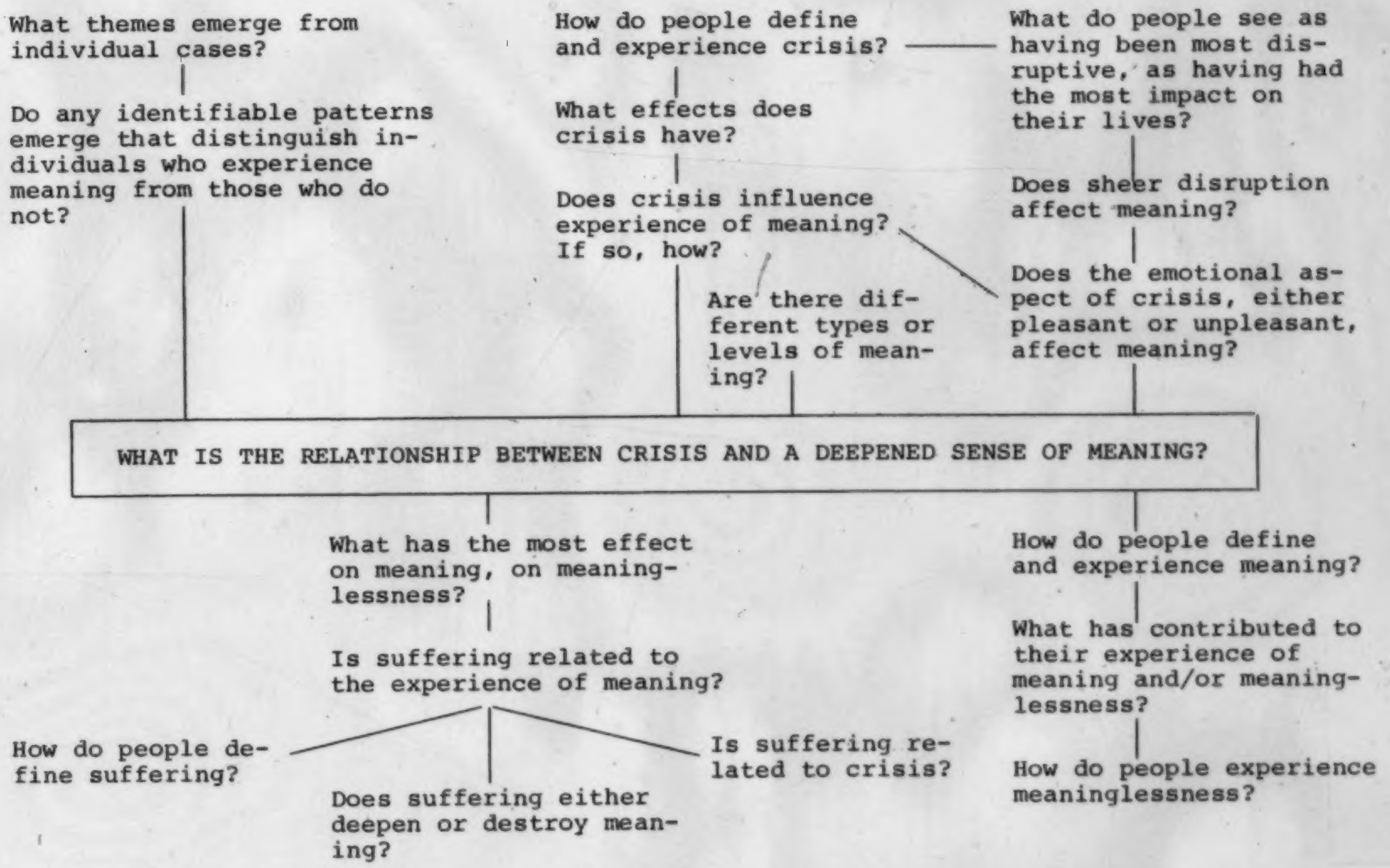
What themes emerge from individual cases?
Do any identifiable patterns emerge that distinguish individuals who experience meaning from those who do not?
How do people define and experience crisis?
What effects does crisis have?
Does crisis influence experience of meaning? If so, how?
Are there different types or levels of meaning?
What do people see as having been most disruptive, as having had the most impact on their lives?
Does sheer disruption affect meaning?
Does the emotional aspect of crisis, either pleasant or unpleasant, affect meaning?
WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CRISIS AND A DEEPENED SENSE OF MEANING?
What has the most effect on meaning, on meaninglessness?
Is suffering related to the experience of meaning?
How do people define suffering?
Does suffering either deepen or destroy meaning?
Is suffering related to crisis?
How do people define and experience meaning?
What has contributed to their experience of meaning and/or meaninglessness?
How do people experience meaninglessness?

Figure 1. Conceptual Diagram

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

An overview of the main tenets of Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy and related views will precede an overview of crisis literature. Some theories on related views of change will then be summarized, followed by a discussion of the concept of finding meaning through crisis.

Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy

Viktor Frankl's theories on meaning provide an especially appropriate framework within which to consider the relationship between meaning and crisis. Frankl developed many of his thoughts about therapy during his years in Nazi Germany concentration camps, a time that can be viewed as a powerful crisis.

Frankl believes that man consists of body, psyche and spirit, not as separate parts but aspects of an irreducible whole. The spiritual or, as sometimes called by Frankl, the noetic or noological dimension, does not necessarily have a religious connotation, though it may. Rather, the spiritual dimension within the framework of Logotherapy refers to what is uniquely human in man. Among man's uniquely human characteristics according to Frankl are his abilities for self-transcendence and self-detachment. Self-transcendence involves going beyond oneself, being directed to someone or something other than oneself whether it is "a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter, a cause to serve or a person to love" (Frankl, 1978, p. 35). Frankl believes that a person becomes "his true self" and more fully human by focusing outward. Self-detachment involves man's capacity to develop an objective perspective. One means for self-detachment is humour, man's ability to laugh at himself. Also included in the noetic dimension is man's will to meaning.

Frankl says that man's primary motivation is to seek meaning. Unlike Freud, who sees man's primary goal as the reduction of pain and the increase of pleasure, Frankl believes that pleasure cannot be attained directly. Rather, it is a secondary gain of man's more basic search for meaning.

Fabry (1980), an American Logotherapist, summarizes the basic tenets of Logotherapy as: (a) all reality has meaning and life never ceases to have meaning; (b) meaning is very specific and changes from person to person and for each person from moment to moment; and (c) each person is unique and each life contains unique demands that have to be discovered and responded to. Response to these demands uncovers meaning. In other words, a man is exposed to his own unique and constantly changing situation. Every situation offers the potential for meaning and it is man's opportunity to actualize this potential.

Meaning potential, according to Frankl, can be fulfilled through any of three avenues: creative, experiential and attitudinal. Responding to a situation can mean creating a work, doing a deed or experiencing a value such as love or beauty, by encountering someone or something or, if unavoidable, even choosing one's attitude toward suffering.

Frankl sees meaning as an absolute, as something to discover rather than something to invent. He says that finding meaning involves perceiving the "possibility embedded in reality" (1978, p. 38). This possibility can be to change the situation or if the situation cannot be changed to change ourselves. Frankl assumes that there is a right action or attitude for every situation, a right response to the meaning which he says exists in every situation.

Frankl also distinguishes between the personal meaning of a given moment and the more abstract and broader meaning universals which are often associated with the term "meaning-in-life." Frankl sees these meaning universals or values, where people have found similar meaning in similar situations, as helping people to find meaning. Generally accepted values such as "be kind to people" and "honesty is the best policy" are examples of universal values (Fabry, 1980).

People are also assisted in their search for meaning by their conscience, which Frankl, as described by Fabry (1980), defines as "an intuitive capacity to find or 'sniff out' the unique meaning gestalt inherent in a situation, to find the meaning in a given situation" (p. 65).

It is the logotherapist's role to help individuals become conscious of what they know deep within about the meaning inherent in any situation and to educate them to their responsibility to make choices even in the face of ultimate uncertainty. Frankl says that education and therapy must help to refine individuals' consciences and help them to develop a hierarchy of values. Man must be responsible for how he answers the question of how to interpret his life, whether theistically or in secular terms. In both cases, Frankl sees logotherapy as able to help people face their responsibility for how they respond to life and the questions it generates.

Frankl's "will to meaning" is seen as a criterion of mental health in Logotherapy. Lack of meaning and purpose are indicative of maladjustment. When a person's will to meaning is frustrated, he will experience an existential vacuum. Although Frankl is especially vocal in addressing the possibility of finding meaning through crisis, others have also written about the relationship.

Related Views

Both in philosophy and psychology, views are held which are similar to Frankl's theory of meaning and to the concept of crisis.

Frankl (1969, 1975) quotes Karl Jaspers and Abraham

Maslow, who espouse similar views on meaning. Jaspers says that "What one is, he has become through that cause which he has made his own" (Fabry, 1980, p. 83); and Maslow (in Frankl, 1975, p. 78) says that self-actualization can best be carried out "via a commitment to an important job."

Several developmental theorists also view crisis as a change agent (Dabrowski, 1964; Erikson, 1968; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1980; Sheehy, 1976). Erik Erikson believes that throughout the life span an individual progresses through stages which are marked by crises. At such times, people are faced with psychosocial tasks to achieve. Like the crisis theorists, Erikson sees these times as creating the climate for increased vulnerability and heightened potential. These challenges present the individual with "moments of decision between progress and regression" (Sheehy, 1976). They are times of restructuring.

> Each comes to its ascendence, meets its crises, and finds its lasting solution . . . toward the end of the stages mentioned . . . . Each successive step, then, is a potential crisis because of a radical change in perspective. Crisis is used here in a developmental sense to connote not a threat of catastrophe, but a turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential, and therefore, the ontogenetic source of generational strength and maladjustment. (Erikson, 1968, pp. 95-96)

Erikson views development as dependent upon how an individual resolves conflicts between his needs and social demands at each of his eight stages of development. Each stage can have a positive or negative outcome such as trust versus mistrust and intimacy versus isolation, eventually leading to either ego integrity or despair. A crisis must be at least partially resolved before an individual can move on to the next stage of life.

Similarly, Gail Sheehy (1976) has utilized a stage theory of human development into which she divides the life cycle into decades such as the Trying Twenties, Catch-30 and the Deadline Decade. Her concern is mainly with adult development and what she calls predictable crises. Each period or stage of life is characterized by tranquility and a sense of equilibrium as compared to the disruptive and uncertain passages. Sheehy posits that each new stage begins with internal shiftings--an "underlying impulse toward change" (p. 29). These internal movements throw a person off balance and signal the beginnings of a new stage of development. Each passage affects changes in four areas of perception: (a) the inner sense of self in relation to others; (b) the proportion of safeness to danger that is felt; (c) perception of time (feeling of having plenty of it or that time is running out); and (d) sense of aliveness or stagnation. These perceptions form a hazy backdrop to one's life and influence the decisions upon which an individual acts. Sheehy says that one must be willing to let go. "Some cherished illusion of safety and comfortably familiar sense of self must be cast off, to allow for the greater expansion of our own distinctiveness" (Sheehy, 1976, p. 21). She also points out that one may choose not to grow. Growth does not automatically happen. She points out that if life accidents (situational crises) occur at the same time as a critical life passage, one may be forced to resolve issues of the passage more effectively. The theme of Sheehy's work can be summarized by the following:

> If I've been convinced by one idea in the course of collecting all the life stories that inform the book, it is this: Times of crisis, of disruption or constructive change, are not only predictable but desirable. They mean growth. (Sheehy, 1976, p. 31)

Rapoport and Rapoport (1980) hold a developmental view of growth which is similar to Erikson and Sheehy, but they divide the life cycle into five stages: childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, establishment phase and later years. Each stage is characterized by certain inner preoccupations and outer challenges. Psychological growth occurs when an individual deals with the specific tasks or challenges that present themselves and achieves transition from one stage to the next. How individuals cope with developmental tasks is explained by three concepts: (a) interest (of individual); (b) opportunity (environment; and (c) resourcefulness (quality allowing for turning of interests into action by using opportunities). They believe that by studying the interaction of these three concepts we can learn how to grow. Interests are bridges between inner drives and outside opportunities. The capacity to develop or express interests is affected by past experiences and innate individual differences. Experiences are affected by outside opportunities. But, outside opportunities do not determine growth; they must be used by the individual. Implied in their concept of resourcefulness is the idea of personal responsibility: "growth is something that cannot be done for you . . . you yourself can help to create the conditions that facilitate your own growth" (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1980, p. 15). The awareness of preoccupations appropriate to life stages, interests to give form to preoccupations and resourcefulness to develop, pursue and act within available resources are seen as essential to growth. These authors also agree with others that the ability to accept and resolve conflicts in creative ways and commitment to growth (the motivation to grow) are important to the growth process.

Dabrowski (1964) also utilizes a concept of crisis. His theory of personality development is called Positive Distintegration. He says that some individuals have the capacity to move toward a personality ideal through successive levels of development: primary integration, unilevel disintegration, and spontaneous multilevel disintegration. The transitions from one level to another come about through breaking down, through disintegrating. This process is experienced as unpleasant by the individual but is necessary to lead to higher levels of development. A person's old way of structuring experience and being-in-the-world must break down to allow for change. There must be disintegration to allow for reintegration. Again, the idea of periods of disruption followed by periods of increased equilibrium and at least partial integration is described.

Erikson (1968), Sheehy (1976), Rapoport & Rapoport

(1980) and Dabrowski (1964) do not speak of meaning, per se, but more generally of the potential for growth through crisis. Like Frankl, they all share the belief that personal choice and responsibility are factors important in determining whether the outcomes of crisis is positive or detrimental.

Similar to Dabrowski's view of change is the view of Forer (1963), a crisis theorist. Both see crisis not only as inevitable but as a prerequisite to growth. Forer implies that the person who does not expect, suffer and even create crises in static periods will stagnate and deteriorate. Similarly, Maslow (1968) sees the complete absence of frustration or pain as dangerous. He says that frustration-tolerance builds strength and that we learn about ourselves--our strengths and limits--by overcoming difficulties and facing challenge and hardship.

Otto (1967) believes that established habit patterns can act against individuals using their resources and actualizing their potential. By habit patterns Otto means such things as daily routines, habitual modes of perception, habitual modes of thinking, habitual modes of feeling and emotionally responding. He sees crises as opportunities for growth, and says that growth occurs through change and that the objective of growth is the creation of an open self-concept. Like Frankl, Otto believes that attitude transforms crisis, and says that if this is recognized on a deep level that it can be an opportunity for growth. Because at the time of crisis a person is in a state of flux, and perhaps more accessible to change than usual, crises can be consciously used as powerful change agents. Otto believes therapists should help people to reframe a crisis situation in order to see it as something to be used.

The above mentioned theorists, if not all existentialists, incorporate some existential elements in their theories. They disagree on or emphasize different factors that they see as contributing to growth and, more specifically, in Frankl's terms, to increased meaning. However, they all include the factors of choice and a belief in the individual's responisibility for the direction change will take. Both crisis theory and existential approaches to the person have in common an emphasis on man's capacity to experience life in the present. This is commonly referred to in psychology as the "here-and-now" as opposed to the "there-and-then." The growth potential of crisis is also emphasized. Existentialism is especially concerned with meaning and its relationship to crisis.

Crisis Theory

Erich Lindemann (1944) laid the groundwork for much of what is called crisis theory after studying the reactions of bereaved families who lost members in a night club fire in the 1940's. Lindemann described stages of grief and suggested that the length of grief reaction depends on how well an individual does his "grief work." Although there is some discussion among crisis theorists as to exactly what constitutes a crisis, it is agreed that bereavement is a crisis to some extent for almost all people. Some studies indicate that bereavement as a crisis affects all ages and both sexes in that generally it has the power to initiate a turning point (Bourque & Back, 1977). Bereavement has in fact been the subject for much of crisis theory (Halpern, 1973).

Although there is some disagreement over specific points, the following is a synthesis of what many theorists (Darbonne, 1967; Forer, 1963; Taplin, 1971) see as characteristic of crisis:

1. It is a state of emotional/cognitive disequilibrium and upset which has been brought on by an emotionally hazardous precipitating event of which the individual is aware. (Crisis refers to the individual's emotional reaction and not to the situation itself.)
2. Disruption occurs because the individual's usual ways of coping and relating to the world are rendered ineffective and the individual feels helpless, confused, and experiences a rise in tension.
3. The individual is left in a particularly open and vulnerable state and is thus more susceptible to the influence of others and also more open to change.
4. There is a time limit or critical period during which the individual is most open to change, usually four to six weeks, during which time a solution is sought to restore some degree of equilibrium.

5. Change initiated by crisis may lead to a higher level of functioning, the same prior level of functioning or a lower level of mental health. Crisis is understood to have growth potential.
6. The presence of supportive people in an individual's life during the time of crisis may have an important influence on how the crisis is resolved.

Crises may be either situational or developmental. A situational crisis refers to the upset precipitated by such external events as bereavement, divorce, geographical moves and change or loss of job. A developmental crisis refers to upset precipitated by the relationship between inner maturation and social expectations, and the adaptations and changes they require as a person moves through the life cycle (Rapoport, 1965). An example of a developmental crisis is the task of achieving intimacy between the ages of twenty and thirty when many people in our culture are expected to get married and "settle down."

What is upsetting for one individual may not be for another. In this sense, crises can be relative. Some think that whether or not an event or situation initiates a crisis for an individual depends on the person's social resources at the time (Lowenthal & Weiss, 1976). Eastham (1970) cites personal resources and personality types as particularly important. Neugarten (1976) offers another perspective, saying that expected life events do not constitute crises for most people. Rather, she sees the timing of an event, not its occurrence, as more likely to create a crisis.

Examples of this would be if marriage did not happen at the socially expected time or if the birth of a child occurred late in a couple's life, past the usual time for having children.

A crisis can sometimes be related to earlier life experiences. An external event that appears inconsequential can precipitate a crisis reaction. The crisis, in such a situation, may not be so much a response to the present event as a working through of a previously unresolved experience. An example of this would be when a person responds hysterically to the death of a pet or a distant relative but is really working through the previously unexpessed grief relating to the death of a close friend.

The Relationship Between Meaning and Crisis

Throughout history, in theology, philosophy, psychology and everyday life, meaning and crisis have been linked.

The concept of finding meaning through crisis is not new to man. It brings to mind images of dying to be born and of birth marking the beginning of physical decay. Biblical passages tell us that whoever tries to keep his life will lose it and whoever loses his life will preserve it (Luke 17:33).

A similar theme can be found in samples of the literature on death and dying (Colgrove, Bloomfield & McWilliams, 1976; Feifel, 1959; Hardt, 1979; Keleman, 1974;

Kubler-Ross, 1975). Death, which can be seen as the ultimate crisis, is not only the antithesis of life, but its mirror reflection. It is the idea that in living we are dying, but also that in dying we are truly freed to live. Old ways of being, experiencing, thinking and understanding fall away and are replaced by new modes of existence. Past attachments crumble and give way to new attachments. Change is movement and process, a leaving behind and a moving on--paradoxical, but on another level intuitively sensible.

Death is sometimes seen as bracketing life and thereby allowing for the possibility of life being meaningful. If death did not exist, there would be no perspective and some would say no morality. Paradoxically, death seems to make what is sometimes seen as the absurdity of life less absurd. Death provides a context for life and confronts with responsibility. It prods people to ask what life, in light of death, means?

Another philosophical notion says that the same properties which make possible growth and change are the same properties that cause disruption and pain, that joy cannot exist without pain and that if everything existed on the same plane there could be no differentiation (Hebblethwaite, 1976). If everything existed on the same plane, meaning could not be experienced. The figure could not be separated from the ground. There must be a background and a context for experience. A peak cannot be a peak unless there is also a valley.

Frankl's views on suffering are especially relevant to the overview of crisis theory in that both see suffering as potentially growthful. Logotherapy focuses on three basic factors of existence: that there is a will to meaning, a meaning in suffering and freedom of will. Frankl says that "meaning can be found not only in spite of but because of unavoidable suffering" (Frankl, 1975, p. 135).

One of Frankl's students who spent time in a mental hospital wrote: "In the darkness I had acquired a sense of my own unique mission in the world . . . the darkest moment of my life, when I lay abandoned as an animal in a cage . . . " (Frankl, 1975, p. 11).

Frankl (1975) paraphrases La Rochefoucauld saying "that just as the small fire is extinguished by the storm whereas a large fire is enhanced by it--likewise a weak faith is weakened by predicaments and catastrophes whereas a strong faith is strengthened by them" (p. 16). Frankl believes that man is free to choose his attitude over any circumstances and that through attitudinal values the tragic aspects of extence (pain, guilt and death) may become positive and creative.

Fabry (1980), who subscribes to Frankl's views on meaning, writes in the context of his own experiences. He says that birth is inseparable from labour pains, both figuratively and literally, and that the history of creative individuals provides many examples of this. He also speaks of the idea that disruption necessitates a search for meaning: "Once a person experiences expulsion from whatever security, he or she is left to grope for meaning and order" (p. 6). Both Fabry and Frankl see tension as part of our humanness. We are faced with choice which brings with it conflict, and with conflict, we experience tension.

The idea of finding meaning through crisis can also be found in the realm of everyday life. Carol Burnett (1981), an actress, singer and comedian, said recently in an interview that:

> Your attitude toward whatever happens to you, good or bad, is going to have an effect on you--and you are in charge of that attitude. You can take a situation and make it a positive experience, or else you can let it drag you down. Somewhere I read a wonderful thing Mary Tyler Moore said, and I'm paraphrasing: "Without pain, I haven't learned courage." If everything goes great all the time when am I going to learn? When am I going to get strong? (Stukane, 1981)

Integration of the Literature

Frankl's views on meaning, the concept of growth through crisis as seen by various theorists, crisis theory and views on the relationship between meaning and crisis have been examined.

Frankl and some other developmental and personality theorists differ in the weight they ascribe to various factors in contributing to meaning, but tend to agree on the importance of choice and responsibility. Though there is some disagreement among crisis theorists as to what constitutes a crisis, some points tend to be agreed upon, such as the importance of support systems, the growth potential of crisis and the increased vulnerability to change during a crisis.

The preceding discussion is not meant to imply that all people find meaning through personal crisis. Crisis is a destructive experience for some and may lead to increased meaninglessness. Frankl, crisis theory and some other related views which have been reviewed, however, see in crisis the opportunity for increased meaning. These discussions lend background to the need for this inquiry. What is the relationship between crisis and a deepened sense of meaning? What contributing factors and themes are present in the experience of individuals that can make crisis a pathway toward increased meaning or toward emptiness and possibly despair? There appears to be little empirical research to answer such questions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Pilot Study

A pilot study was done with five individuals varying in age and educational background. Each person filled out the Purpose in Life Test (PIL) and Schedule of Recent Experience (SRE) and was then interviewed. This provided an opportunity to revise the interview format and questions and to ensure that questions were clear and understandable to respondents. It also served as a check on validity by ensuring that the questions elicited information to the intent of the study, and allowed the interviewer to become familiar with and proficient at using the interview format.

Subjects

Forty subjects, all graduate students in The Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta, aged 25 and over, were given the PIL and SRE from which 10 (one male and nine females) were chosen for interviews. They ranged in age from 28 to 42 with a mean age of 35. Five subjects were married, three were divorced and two were single.

Graduate students were chosen as subjects because of their availability and also as a control for educational level and thus indirectly for intelligence. The sample was taken from graduate students aged 25 and over as an arbitrary control for life experience, acting on the assumption that graduate students in their early twenties are likely to have less life experience than older graduate students.

Procedure

The Purpose in Life test and Schedule of Recent Experience were given to the 40 graduate students. After receiving permission from instructors, the investigator visited various classes in different departments in The Faculty of Education to give an overview of the thesis topic, of the time required of participants and to answer questions. Those who volunteered were then given the questionnaires and asked to return them upon completion as soon as possible. Volunteers were told that some of them would be called for an interview.

From the results of the questionnaire, four possible combinations existed: low meaning/low crisis, low meaning/high crisis, high meaning/low crisis, and high meaning/high crisis.

The outcome of these questionnaires was to be used to select a sample of 10 subjects for in-depth interviews, five from each of the most prominent quadrants. Most individuals were expected to fall into either the LM/LC or

HM/HC categories. Analysis of the questionnaire results using chi-square showed no correlation or clustering of any significance. The results of the SRE were also questionable. Based on self-reports of participants, and also inconsistency in respondents' answers, questions about the validity of the instrument came to light. For example, going over results it appeared that individuals developed a set either for high change or low change. It was obvious for some subjects from the demographic information at the beginning of the questionnaire that they were married, but this was not indicated on the actual questionnaire as a change event, even though such a category clearly exists. Subjects also reported frustration at filling out the SRE saying that questions could be interpreted in any number of ways, and also that if they were to fill it out again it would probably come out quite differently. Because of the ambiguity experienced by subjects while filling out the questionnaire, and apparent inconsistency in answers, it was decided not to use the SRE in selecting a sample. As well as the response set which appeared to develop, there were other reasons for deciding not to use the SRE. The nature of the present study is phenomenological and includes an intent to describe individuals' experience of crisis. This seemed inconsistent with Holme's attempt to quantify crisis. It was felt that more detailed and less preconceived data could be collected by emphasizing primarily the in-depth interviews. Furthermore, Holme's definition of crisis does not consider the emotional response of individuals in crisis, an aspect considered to be important by crisis theorists. It may be useful for others using the SRE to give respondents more detailed instructions than are provided with the instrument. Although more time-consuming, an interview could solicit the same information but with greater detail and clarity.

Only PIL scores were used to select a sample for in-depth interviews. Individuals with the five highest and five lowest scores--that is, highest and lowest on meaning--were chosen for interviews.

Specific procedural guidelines are outlined in the section on the interview schedule, but one general guideline is worthy of note. Data analysis is viewed as an ongoing process. Beginning with the questionnaires and throughout the interviews, a picture of subjects' experiences and perceptions gradually emerged. As this understanding grew, new insights and leads sometimes presented themselves and were then pursued with further questioning and clarifying.

Instrumentation

The Purpose in Life Test

The Purpose in Life (PIL) Test is an attitude scale developed by Crumbaugh and Maholick (1969), which is based on Viktor Frankl's theory and psychotherapeutic approach called Logotherapy. The PIL was designed to measure what Frankl calls existential vacuum; that is, the degree to which meaning in life is experienced and the emptiness when meaning has not been discovered.

The PIL is comprised of three parts. Part A consists of 20 Likert-type items with responses scaled from one to seven and is the only part which is objectively scored. Parts B and C are incomplete sentences and paragraphs and are used for more subjective interpretation.

Validity

Both construct and criterion (concurrent) validity have been determined by Crumbaugh (1968). Crumbaugh supports the construct validity of the PIL by correctly predicting in order the means of four "normal" populations: (a) successful business and professional personnel; (b) active and leading Protestant parishioners; (c) college undergraduates; and (d) indigent non-psychiatric hospital patients. Although less accurate, the expected drop from neurotics to alcoholics to non-schizophrenic psychotics was correctly predicted. Crumbaugh also reports correct predictions of difference between patient and non-patient populations.

Two measures were used to evaluate concurrent (criterion) validity: (a) correlations between therapists' perceptions of clients' degree of purpose and meaning and the clients' PIL scores; and (b) the correlations between the PIL scores of parishioners and ratings given by their ministers. Relationship between the PIL and therapists' ratings was .38 (Pearson Product-Moment, N = 50), and between the scale and ministers' ratings was .47 (Pearson Product-Moment, N = 120).

Reliability

Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964) reported the split-half (odd-even) reliability of the PIL as .81 (Pearson Product-Moment, N = 225), Spearman-Brown corrected to .90. Crumbaugh (1968) reported similarly a relationship of .85 (Pearson Product-Moment, N = 120), Spearman-Brown corrected to .92.

Administration

Subjects were asked to circle corresponding numbers on a continuum from one to seven for each of 20 items representing his choice. The time required is approximately 10 minutes for most subjects.

Scoring

The sum of the twenty numbers which are circled.

Interpretation

Interpretation is based on norms established on 1,151 cases reported by Crumbaugh (1968a). Raw scores of 113 or above suggest clear purpose and meaning whereas scores of 91 or below suggest the lack of clear meaning and purpose. Scores falling between 92 and 112 are considered indecisive. A mean score of 102 and standard deviation of

19 were reported in the sample on which the test was normed.

The Schedule of Recent Experience (SRE)

The SRE is a paper-and-pencil questionnaire which is used to obtain information about the occurrence of events during specified time periods in an individual's life experience. The time interval recorded by the SRE can be modified to meet specific research needs. From the study of some 5,000 case histories, the life events of the SRE were chosen for their occurrence prior to the onset of physical or emotional illness. Holmes found that only some of the events were negative or "socially undesirable" and that in fact many were initiated by people. However, common to all of the life events was that each event required some change and adaptive behaviour by the individual involved, a change in their ongoing life pattern. To Holmes, crisis involves change from an existing steady state, not emotion, psychological meaning or social desirability.

In an attempt to add precision to the SRE, the Social Readjustment Rating Scale was developed to estimate the intensity or degree of adjustment associated with particular life events. A sample of 394 subjects provided magnitude estimations of the amount of change and readjustment required by each of the events, relative to marriage which was assigned the arbitrary value of 500. The values of the SRRS are used to weigh the relative impact of life events in the SRE.

The SRE consists of 42 life events.

Validity

Holmes holds that the method by which the SRE was developed supports the validity of the instrument in that the events comprising the SRE emerged from close examination of the setting in which illness developed. Maximal validity of the SRE was established as between the ages of 25 and 55 years,,in a cross-validation of two samples totalling 165 admissions, pretested for readability and clarity.

Reliability

The SRE was given at five month intervals to a group of 40 newly admitted white patients, aged 25 to 60, with tuberculosis, and a reliability coefficient of 0.831 was obtained between the first and second administration.

Casey, Masuda and Holmes (1967) studied the 10-year SRE response among physicians who were given the SRE on two separate occasions spaced nine months apart. The reliability coefficient (Pearson's r) between the two administrations was 0.67 ($p = 0.0005$) for the period of time eight years before the first SRE administration, and 0.74 ($p = 0.0005$) for the period five years prior to the initial SRE.

An r of 0.59 ($p = 0.0005$) was found between values of events on the SRE and the percentage of consistent responses. Events with the most impact were most consistently recalled.

Mean total Life Change Unit scores showed that significantly less material was recalled for more distant time periods in the SRE.

Holmes cites other studies in the manual accompanying the SRE which point to the effect of several factors on the reliability of the SRE. Reliability appears to decrease in relation to: (a) time interval between successive administrations; (b) age, education, and probable intelligence of subjects; (c) time interval covered by the SRE; (d) wording and format of life event items; and (e) the relative salience of the life events.

Statistical Considerations

It is suggested that because the frequency distribution for any single event of the SRE is highly skewed, and the distribution of LCU scores in a sample is also skewed, that researchers be cautioned against using standard techniques for statistical inference with life change data. Nonparametric statistics are suggested as an appropriate alternative because of their lack of dependence on distribution assumptions.

Administration

Subjects are simply asked to record the number of times each event occurs within specified time periods. The SRE is a self-report questionnaire which may also be used as a framework for structured interviews.

Scoring

Items marked on the SRE are assigned values according to the Social Readjustment Scale. The life change score for a time period in Life Change Units (LCU) is calculated as a weighted item frequency: LCU = the sum of (Item frequency x Scale value).

Interpretation

Holmes says that the more life change experienced the greater the likelihood of illness. Based on data, he uses the following criteria to evaluate LCU scores in the previous year:

1. 300+ LCU = 80% chance of illness in the near future;
2. 150-299 LCU = 50% chance of illness in the near future;
3. Less than 150 LCU = 30% chance of illness in the near future.

According to Holmes, the reported changes in health must occur within two years following a cluster of life changes, as it is during this period that an individual appears to be at risk.

A life crisis is defined by Holmes as any clustering of life-change events whose individual values sum to 150 LCU's or more in one year. The higher the LCU score, the more an individual is at risk for possible illness.

The researcher has difficulty with Holmes' definition of crisis given the ambiguity of participant response in his experience using the SRE.

Interview Schedule

A semi-structured interview schedule was designed to investigate individuals' experience of meaning, of crisis, and of their perception of the relationship between meaning and crisis. All interviews were taped, both during the pilot and the main part of the study. After the pilot, portions of tapes were critiqued by a committee member, and after reviewing all of the tapes both the general format and specific questions were revised where necessary.

Interviewing as a research methodology is characterized by its directness. It is based on the assumption that the researcher can know something about another person by asking him directly (Kerlinger, 1964). Jaspers (1923/1963) believes that individuals' self-descriptions are most helpful in developing an understanding of psychological phenomena ". . . which can be evoked and tested out in the course of personal conversation. From this we get our best-defined and clearest data. Written descriptions by the patient may have a content but in this form we can do nothing else but accept them. An experience is best described by the person who has undergone it" (p. 55).

In an interview, the researcher is also the research instrument. The researcher has a world view which sets expectations and parameters, some of which have been identified in the section on procedure. As the research instrument, the writer works toward understanding the experience and "world" of another by looking, questioning, listening (both to what is said and what is not said) and withholding judgement (Peavy, 1976).

Support for interview methodologies including guidelines is provided by numerous authors including Becker and Geer (1958), Kerlinger (1964), Jaspers (1923/1963), Peavy (1976) and Richardson, Dohrenwend and Klein (1965). Kerlinger (1964) suggests several criteria for good question writing: The questions should be clear and unambiguous, they should not be leading, items should not demand information that the respondent does not have, delicate material that may spark resistance should be worded in "soft" rather than "hard" expressions and be built up to rather than introduced suddenly, the type of question should be the most appropriate one (for example, open or closed) for the desired information, and the questions should not be loaded with social desirability.

The interview format used in this investigation is semi-structured, which combines elements of both schedule and non-schedule interviews. All respondents were asked the same questions in the same order, beginning with demographic data, moving to fairly abstract questions and then to questions of a more personal nature. The sequencing of questions from more non-threatening to more personal questions allowed for an interviewer-respondent relationship to be established gradually and thereby increased the respondent's involvement (Richardson *et al.*, 1965). The questions were used as starting points to allow both interviewer and respondent to ask for clarification, and for the respondent to elaborate upon and talk about the questions in ways that were meaningful to him or her. This allowed the uniqueness of each person and his experience to emerge. It also increased the comfort level of respondents by making the interview seem less artificial and contrived. The comfort level of respondents and the trust level between interviewer and respondents is important in establishing the validity of the interview. Open-ended questions were used whenever possible, keeping in mind that unexpected responses to such can suggest possibilities of relationships not originally anticipated (Kerlinger, 1964).

Procedural guidelines used are as follows:

1. Respondents were given an overview of the research topic to enable them to put into context the questions they would be asked. Knowing the area of investigation and its rationale also seemed to increase their comfort level and thus their participation.
2. The interview format was explained to participants, who were encouraged to ask for clarification at any time. Respondents were told that some questions may fit more with them than others and, before proceeding, an opportunity was given for them to ask any questions.
3. Demographic information was gathered by asking questions about work/educational background, family, and active or inactive religious affiliation, if any. This was also a time of establishing rapport between respondents and myself before moving on to more structured

questions.

4. All of the structured questions were asked in the described order.
5. Throughout the interview, both respondent and interviewer asked for clarification and elaboration.
6. Analysis of data was ongoing. When patterns and relationships seemed to emerge they were pursued during the course of the interview, and clarified and checked with the experience and perception of the respondent.
7. At the end of every interview, respondents were asked to comment on what the interview was like for them.
8. All interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of respondents.

Delimitations

Conclusions drawn from interviews do not necessarily correspond with actual events, but do provide information on individuals' perception and experience of events. This is not to discount the importance and validity of such data, but rather to caution against generalizing the unique and specific experience of one or more individuals further than is warranted (Becker & Geer, 1958). The present study investigates the relationship between meaning and crisis only within the context of the lives of ten participants.

It must also be kept in mind that the present study is concerned with the relationship between meaning and crisis and will not necessarily provide information about causation of meaning.

Definitions Used to Guide the Research

Meaning: The degree to which a sense of purpose, as outlined in Viktor Frankl's theory of Logotherapy, is experienced by an individual. Further elaboration and clarification of Frankl's concept of meaning will be helpful to the reader at this point.

Briefly, Frankl believes that all reality has meaning. Meaning is a given, an absolute. Meaning is also specific and changes from person to person and from moment to moment. Every situation offers meaning potential and meaning is highly personal. This meaning of the moment is distinguished from the broader values, or meaning universals shared by people who go through similar situations and find meaning in similar ways. Man is responsible for discovering the meaning potential in every situation in which he finds himself and respond to it.

Man's response can be through any of three avenues: creative, experiential and attitudinal. Frankl says that even in the most adverse conditions man is free to choose his attitude toward his circumstances and by so doing experience meaning. Before proceeding, it is important to see Frankl's definition of meaning in the context of existentialists who define meaning quite differently.

The distinction between created and discovered meaning needs clarification. Unlike the French existentialists, Camus and Sartre, who see man as creating his own meaning in order to continue living in a meaningless world, Frankl holds a different view. Fabry (1980) provides the analogy of a projection screen. Camus and Sartre view meaning as man's projection on the empty screen of life whereas Logotherapy sees meaning as hidden behind the screen. Frankl conceives meaning as something to be discovered.

Crisis: Change experiences to the extent that they cause disruption thus requiring adaptive, coping behaviour on the part of the individual. It is recognized that disruptive experiences may be experienced either as pleasant or unpleasant.

In keeping with the phenomenological orientation of this study, meaning and crisis will be defined individually by each of the ten subjects in the case studies.

Analysis of Data

Throughout the study, data analysis was ongoing from the review of test results to the completion of interviews and examination of their contents. A picture of individuals' life experiences and ways of being-in-the-world gradually developed. When patterns emerged during the course of interviews, they were pursued with questions for further clarification. Upon completion of the interviews, tapes were reviewed until detailed summaries and partial transcripts were written. The data was then examined for emergent themes relating to individuals' experiences of meaning and crisis.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter provides a summary of content and individual patterns emerging from each of the ten interviews. Demographic information including age, marital status, family background, work/educational history and religious affiliation is for the most part omitted. The rationale for this omission is twofold: (a) demographic information, in the analysis of cases, does not appear particularly significant to the themes of meaning and crisis; instances where demographic information appears to be a factor in the relationship between meaning and crisis are evident in the summary of interviews, but divulge less identifying information than was present in the demographic data gathered at the beginning of interviews; and (b) demographic information is omitted to ensure the anonymity of subjects. Identifying details are altered but an attempt is made to preserve the tone of the interviews in order to convey the uniqueness of each individual. This is accomplished through the frequent use of quotations. Subjects are in their late twenties and thirties and are all graduate students in Education. Case descriptions are organized as follows: (a) scores on the Purpose in Life Test and summary of Parts B and C, the written section of the PIL; (b) themes on meaning; (c) themes on crisis and change; (d) themes relating meaning and crisis; (e) comments; and (f) summary of case and emergent themes.

Case Descriptions

Subject 1 - Jenny

Purpose in Life Test. Scored 73, suggesting lack of clear meaning and purpose. Meaninglessness is also reflected in statements such as "the most hopeless thing . . . is living," "I get bored . . . easily," "the whole purpose of my life . . . is unknown," "to me all life is . . . useless," and "my life is . . . half over." Jenny writes that she does not have clear-cut aims, ambitions or goals but mostly just drifts along.

Meaning. Jenny believes that individuals define meaning in their own way; for some it can be career, economic goals, family or religious meaning. For herself, Jenny does not know how she would define the term and says she does not know what her meaning in life is--she "just seems to be drifting along." Talking about what keeps her going, she says, "I guess most important are friendships that I've established . . . I feel that if I'm here for any purpose it's to keep these people company." Jenny had difficulty answering questions about the difference between experiencing meaning and meaninglessness because, as she says, "Most of my life is meaningless." Such questions were answered in the context of moments in Jenny's friendships--"when I've been able to be there to help people in difficult times or even sharing some really happy times with them." When she communicates with others at "a certain level" she feels "a sort of an anchor," a positive emotional feeling. What she does seems to "really matter." She feels more involved, "forgets about herself," and "doesn't feel quite so alone" when sharing with others. The experience is described as "getting moral support from them somehow." This is in contrast to most of the time when Jenny sees herself as "just sort of here, drifting around," and she is more likely to be "wrapped up in my own little world." When focused on myself I get "really uptight, nervous and anxious over things." Jenny says that meaninglessness does not feel negative, but is just "sort of there." "I'm not unhappy. I'm kind of neutral." She does not know what has contributed to her feeling of meaninglessness, and of drifting along and thinks that she has always been this way.

Crisis and Change. Jenny rates herself "toward the top end" of a nine-point change scale compared to others, describing the changes as both internal and external and "not dramatic things but a lot of shifting about." She identifies getting married as having the most impact on her life in the constraints she feels it imposes. The disruption of her husband's job which requires much mobility has interfered with her career plans: "My career had to be shelved." In her first seven years of marriage, there were about eight moves. She knew before getting married that many moves would be required, but says it "still gets hard to take at times."

Jenny describes her environment as quite stable before marriage with only one move before age 22. The only move which she found particularly upsetting was the last one because "it came at a bad time." Serious marital problems when her husband had an affair, finding out she could not have children, both while "putting down roots on her own . . . and feeling quite contented there," were contributing factors. She also established some especially strong ties with neighbors "who adopted me into the community" and found it difficult to leave not knowing "where I'd ever experience that again without going back there." The ongoing meaninglessness "didn't matter there so much." She found daily farm tasks satisfying and time-consuming, thus not having the "opportunity to think about other things." Jenny sees the main effects of these disruptions as making her cautious of establishing "any really close ties. I wouldn't want to go through that again."

Jenny sees crisis as having a negative connotation and defines it as "any event that people have serious trouble coping with." She sees crisis as when something within you is lacking that would permit you to cope: "when you really can't pull through something on your own." The one event that Jenny identifies as having been a crisis in her life ~~is~~ was when her husband had an affair. What was most upsetting was that her husband lied to her. Jenny was aware that "these things happen" and that her husband was "no more immune than anyone" but "always thought we'd be able to be open about it right from the start and I think that's what really threw me." The worst part of the crisis lasted about three months when the status of their relationship was uncertain, but Jenny was "depressed for a long time after that."

Jenny handled the crisis by withdrawing, looking at her options, "trying not to let her emotions run away with her" and confronting her husband with the option of ending the affair or the marriage. Jenny was glad the crisis occurred where she had the close support of her neighbor friend. She also felt removed from the crisis "almost as if it was happening to someone else." She doesn't recall spending much time thinking but says she was very "organized" and went through it "business-like." The move west was already in process and she was responsible for the arrangements.

Jenny sees herself as having changed as a result of the crisis. She learned that "people can't be as open as I'd like them to be," that people don't always know when they're being honest, and are unaware of their own limitations.

Most helpful during the crisis was "being an independent-type person," recognizing her own strength, and receiving the support of her neighbor who "never sympathized, gave advice or criticized but just listened." Least helpful was advice given by people. "I could see what direction I was heading in and didn't need it." Jenny feels it would have been more helpful if her husband had made a decision about their relationship earlier on as she found the three-month period of his uncertainty and "back and forth shifting" difficult.

Distinguishing between crisis and suffering, Jenny thinks of suffering as physical. Compared to others, she sees herself as having experienced almost no suffering as she defines it.

Looking back on her life, she says she would change nothing.

Relationship Between Meaning and Crisis. When asked why she thinks she experiences meaninglessness compared to some other people, Jenny replied that if others really looked at their goals and what they see as important that they may find out they're not as meaningful as they think. She also thinks that the amount of change she has experienced in the past 12 years may have contributed to her lack of meaning: "I haven't set long-term goals, I don't really pin my hopes on anything. We might not be here for very long . . . maybe I'd have set more concrete goals if I'd been in one place for a longer period of time."

Comments. Jenny found the definition questions most difficult. She felt at ease during the interview, saying she almost forgot about the tape.

Case Summary and Themes. Jenny experiences life for the most part as meaningless and sees herself as drifting along aimlessly. She has experienced much change and disruption through geographical moves, and a crisis in her marriage. She sees herself as independent and strong and tends to deal with crisis by withdrawing and trying to remain calm, rational, well-organized, and business-like. Relationships are a major theme. She experiences a lack of closeness with her family, and recalls the support of a close friend as being especially important during a crisis period. Both the disruption of moving and the crisis period she has described appear to have affected her relationships. She is more cautious and reluctant to establish ties in order to avoid the hurt of separation and loss, and views people as less capable of openness than she used to believe. Jenny sees the high amount of change she has experienced as possibly contributing to her lack of meaning.

Subject 2 - Heather

Purpose in Life Test. Scored 80, suggesting lack of clear meaning and purpose. This is also reflected in statements such as "My life is . . . ambiguous," "I have achieved . . . little of what I want yet," "The most hopeless thing . . . is standing still, making no progress," and "To me all life is . . . a game not to be taken too seriously." Heather sees herself as very goal/task oriented in several areas: being a professional in her chosen field, personal growth through self-understanding and acceptance, and developing a stable male-female relationship with current mate. She is frustrated by what she sees as a split between two professional interests, and is unsure how to fit them together.

She also sees herself as being in an early stage of progress in all of these goals and feels that given her age she should be farther along.

Meaning. Heather believes that meaning for other people is what "makes them feel satisfied" and what is seen as important. For herself, Heather defines meaning as what "makes sense to me in my life . . . in a total sort of way." She ties it in with self-fulfillment and with doing what she wants to do. Meaning is described as feeling like it "fits" and is contrasted with "something that's irrelevant that I can do without." Heather experiences meaning through relationships, personal growth and awareness through art. Art provides a "sense of personal power." Heather says that control is important to her, and through the artistic process she experiments, tries different solutions and problem-solves. "I can structure, re-structure and alter, creating a world through my art." Heather experiences the difference between meaning and meaninglessness as "very distinct." Meaning feels "solid," "right," "positive," "whole," "completed," "optimistic," and "peaceful." Meaninglessness feels "contradictory," "pulled," "stuck in questioning stance," "divisive," "doubtful," "uncomfortable," "fragmented," "transparent," "insubstantial," and "not connected with experiences." When experiencing meaning, Heather acts with more confidence and spontaneity and sees herself as having a more powerful personal presentation. She relates with more openness and makes decisions more effectively.

When not experiencing meaning, she "hangs on the edges of things," "gets caught in analyzing," "stalls at making decisions," and loses her "sense of personal power." Heather notices that she thinks more "optimistically" when she experiences meaning. She also thinks about things differently by exploring more issues on deeper levels and being "more open to different ways of seeing and doing." When not experiencing meaning, she thinks more "narrowly," "repetitively ruminates on things," "gets blocked," is "reduced to thinking on minimal sorts of things," and "closes down thought processes." Without meaning, she feels sluggish and says anxiety and doubt is reflected in her voice characteristics. Physically, when she is experiencing meaning, Heather feels a sense of health, warmth and comfortable breathing patterns. She feels energetic and alert. Heather feels that she has come to experience meaning at different times in her life, initially accidentally, and then begins to pay attention to what feels "right." It is a "surprise thing" where she suddenly realizes that "this is all right." "Used to be I'd find myself in situations and not know exactly why I got there and what's going on, then find out I'd have to react to get out of it. I'm trying to do more active planning now and checking things out rather than falling into them."

Crisis and Change. Heather sees herself as having experienced much change especially in the past four years. She rates herself six to eight on a nine-point change scale compared with others. Involvement in the visual art process, relationships and finances have had the most impact on Heather. She feels she has gone from a more passive to a more active stance--she feels more in control rather than helpless though says she still doubts this often. She has also learned more about herself and the risks she is and is not willing to take, and also learned more about the reality of external controls that sometimes influence her life. The state of her finances are one such control. Changes in finances, relationships and transitions between school and work are all identified as disruptions. Heather does not "accept loss easily" which she sees as tying in with all three areas and says that she gets "intensely involved with people." She experiences these disruptions mainly as unpleasant, as a "constant readjustment and scrambling mentally and emotionally," with career changes being both pleasant and unpleasant. The effects of the disruptions on Heather are noticed in feeling worn down physically, feeling less flexible and at times more pessimistic if she feels she is not "making headway." She experiences the disruptions as "too much change too fast" and feels the "need to take a break and rest."

Heather defines crisis as either internally or externally precipitated states or events which have detrimental effects. A crisis pushes a person beyond what they can handle and there is a feeling of being unable to cope, of being at risk. There is also less efficiency and less control as well as an element of urgency, feeling that "this has to be resolved" and having to confront whatever is happening. An external crisis would be financial poverty, and an internal crisis involves ways of "dealing with, looking at and thinking about things." What is a crisis for one person may not be for another. Heather adds that "I can operate for extended periods of time close to crisis." Heather talks about three crises: when her boyfriend nearly died of a heart attack, times when "I doubted my own ability to achieve what I want to," and losses in interpersonal relationships. Heather views crisis as more related to internal than external factors and says that crises have less impact on her if "I am feeling good about myself." Heather handles internal crises by talking, evaluating and looking at what she can do to maximize her strengths and get more closely in touch with her emotions. Her main response to external crises is emotional denial: "My pattern has been to shovel it under. I'm cognitively fairly aware but tend to shut down emotions." During crises Heather feels powerless, helpless and angry. Physically she either feels "keyed up" or exhausted and fluctuates between the two. She also sends herself negative messages regarding her ability.

Heather sees herself as having changed as a result of crises she has experienced by learning more about her strengths and coping abilities, and by learning that she can change her attitudes toward an experience, if nothing else. She feels more a sense of who she is and feels less easily overwhelmed by externals. Crises are negative when Heather gets "stuck" and when her "inner resources" are not as strong.

Support, self-awareness (especially of emotions), gaining different perspectives and seeking alternatives have been helpful for Heather during times of crisis. Ignoring the problem and her feelings have been least helpful. Heather believes that solid friendships and support are vital and that people "run into major difficulties if operating in isolation."

Heather is not sure how to separate the terms "crisis" and "suffering," but made a distinction in the same way she did with crisis between "factual suffering" as opposed to self-imposed suffering.

If she could change anything, Heather would want the self-awareness she now has at an earlier age. The main theme here is to have used her time more effectively.

Relationship Between Meaning and Crisis. Heather describes her experience of crisis as unpleasant for the most part, similar in many ways to her description of meaninglessness. However, she views the effects of crisis in a positive light, and describes them similarly to how she describes meaning.

Comments. Heather found the interview to be "hard work" as she was having to think more "specifically" about things than she usually does. She was surprised at how she found herself talking about crises, realizing that she has a much more positive view of the effects of crisis than she thought. "When I came into the interview I saw crises more negatively." Heather found the format comfortable but says that some questions were difficult to answer concretely.

Case Summary and Themes. Heather experiences meaning at times and lack of meaning at other times. She appears to be in transition between old patterns and recent learnings. She sees herself as having experienced much disruption and change in the past few years. Several themes emerge. Transition is a theme. Heather sees herself as going from a "more passive, helpless" stance to a more active stance; she has some awareness of ways of being that she is working to change; she experiences more inner control, rather than feeling controlled by externals as much as she used to. The experience of crisis is similar to the experience of meaninglessness and the described results of crisis are similar to the experience of meaning. Meaning appears to be related to control. Paradoxically, the more peaceful and centered Heather feels, the more involved she feels and the more capable she is of contacting and feeling connected with experiences. Self-esteem is related to experiencing meaning and to handling crises effectively. Self-reflection and self-doubt are often described by Heather. The importance of support during crisis and of gaining different perspectives are seen as important. Heather conveyed more experience of meaning in the interview than is evident on the PIL. This may be related to the fact that Heather defines meaning in the context of self-fulfillment and doing what she wants to do, in combination with the fact that Heather sees herself as having accomplished little of what she hopes to. Her aims are also somewhat uncertain at present, as reflected in the frustration and confusion she experiences between what she sees as competing interests and how she spends her time.

Subject 3 - Lynn

Purpose in Life Test. Scored 86, suggesting lack of clear meaning and purpose. Lack of meaning and purpose is also reflected in such statements as: "More than anything, I want . . . release from tension and peace with myself," "My life is . . . running on automatic," "I get bored . . . easily," and "The whole purpose of my life . . . is not clear to me."

Meaning. Lynn believes that meaning for other people is defined in terms of purpose, having and fulfilling goals and belonging. It involves being a productive, accepted member of society. Lynn finds it difficult to say how she would define meaning. She sees it as discovering and being true to "something within yourself that feels purposeful." It is a unique, internal state of being and experience. Lynn says this is only what she thinks it is because "I don't think I've found it." "I want but don't have an inner purposeful kind of drive." Lynn believes that meaning would be experienced as a "sense of aliveness, of direction, of purpose, wholeness, peace and energy." It would probably also involve suffering but there would be a "groundedness, a focus, more willingness in the sense of courage to experience life." This was contrasted with "a lostness, a defensiveness."

The difference between the experience of meaning and meaninglessness were discussed based on how Lynn feels when she "has glimpses of meaning" keeping in mind that she does not see herself as experiencing meaning. Meaning is something you "gain slowly but don't lose," and comes more when I am more in touch with "who I am." It is "clearness and aliveness" though not always a good feeling. It is a feeling of "having shed meaningless stuff and gotten down to the nitty-gritty of what's important." Lynn goes on to say that most of the time she experiences meaninglessness which is "like just going along on automatic." "Bored is the closest word to describe how I feel most of the time." Lynn tends to "shut things out" and "trudge along." She describes how she would act when getting close to experiencing meaning as paradoxical: she says that she can be severely depressed and shutting down whereas others would probably see her as "more alive," "less tense," "more open," and "more willing to contact." Lynn feels she has come close to experiencing meaning by "taking a risk," and "getting in touch with myself." "The ultimate risk in finding meaning for me is death. That's what I fear, a feeling of dying." Lynn says that when she gets down to the core of who she is that she encounters a fear of physical death though she believes the fear also involves fear of emotional death. She feels a sense of dying most when "close to a breakthrough, when I am most vulnerable, close to something, an awareness." Lynn sees the dying as emotional and spiritual dying but experiences it physically: "I've actually had people have to revive me." "I've gotten to the point where I almost die physically." "That's why meaning is involved in letting go, in dying, letting go of all the falseness that has been constructed that is your ground here on earth."

Crisis and Change. Lynn rates herself eight on a nine-point scale of change compared to others her age. She sees her "battle with depression" as having had the most impact on her life. She was severely depressed as a child through to her early twenties. Depression and her subsequent dysfunction was identified as most disruptive in the past. It was experienced as unpleasant, but the effect was feeling closer to her "self." She also came out of depressions with the feeling of being strong and of having survived. Lynn views her parent's death as a current disruption which she is still in the middle of. She thinks she will be overwhelmed when she decides to look at it more fully. She describes her experience of her parent's illness and death as "devastating," "too quick, too final," and felt alone and helpless. Lynn assumed the role of helper in her family but seemed to receive little support herself.

Lynn defines a crisis as either a negative or positive change event or turning point that calls on a person's resources and demands "change in self in terms of responding to and coping with crisis." She identifies both her parent's death and her depressions as crises. Her parent's death is seen as a present and ongoing crisis. She has experienced feeling "powerless" and "helpless." She has also had a "loss of personal power," and an "angry, futile feeling that nothing would help." She withdrew from others while at the same time acted as a support for relatives. She has experienced "physical deadness," "chest pain," "bladder pain," "tiredness," and "tension," and has thought of "dying."

Lynn's responses to questions on whether or not she feels she has changed as a result of the crises are paradoxical. She sees herself as having changed from all of the crises but does not sense a change at present. She sees herself as having "come more together," and "feels more integrated," while at the same time she feels "more lost."

Lynn feels like nothing helped during times of crisis though therapy "provided a place to be with what was happening." Least helpful were people denying her feelings.

Lynn uses the words crisis and suffering interchangeably and sees suffering as having been involved in all of what she has experienced as crisis. She would rate herself eight on a nine-point scale of suffering compared to others her age. Lynn adds that she "has never been happy, though has had moments of happiness."

If she could change anything about her life to date, Lynn would want to give herself more permission "to let go," and would want to be more naive. She would want to respond to life with "freshness and openness rather than being hardened and unwilling to take risks." Lynn believes that naiveté and openness are connected with experiencing meaning.

Relationship Between Meaning and Crisis. Lynn sees herself as having experienced a lot of disruption and crisis and experiences little or no meaning in her life. The effects of disruption and crisis are described paradoxically, seeming to make for both increased sense of integration and strength and at the same time making for feelings of being lost.

Comments. Lynn feels the interview has helped her to clarify some of her thoughts about meaning and death. She finds talking about her parent painful and says she always feels uptight and embarrassed when talking about herself. She experienced what she calls an otherness perspective saying that talking about past crises is almost like talking about another person. She expressed feeling comfortable with me.

Case Summary and Themes. Lynn experiences meaninglessness and characterizes herself as being bored most of the time. She sees herself as having experienced a lot of change and crisis in her life including long-term depression and the recent death of a parent. She seems to receive little support herself though she often puts herself in the role of helper. A major theme is her inability or unwillingness to risk -- to risk being more fully aware of herself and her fears, especially those related to death. There is also a sense of not risking involvement with life, of being unable to respond to life with "naiveté." To take risks for Lynn in some way implies death. Perhaps it is death of her self-concept, as seems to be implied in the statement that meaning is involved in "letting go of all the falseness that has been constructed that is your ground here on earth." It is interesting that Lynn mentions the "loss of personal power" in meaninglessness, the same words used by Subject 2--Heather. Another theme in Lynn's experience is that of paradox, that crisis seems to bring for Lynn both increased meaning and at the same time increased meaninglessness.

Subject 4 - Susan

Purpose in Life Test. Scored 98, which falls in the indecisive range indicating neither the lack nor presence of clear meaning and purpose. Statements indicate both the presence of meaning and meaninglessness: "My life is . . . at present, a struggle but worthwhile," "I have achieved . . . some personal growth." "I have practically no aims, ambitions, or goals which are clear-cut." I suppose it is "to become aware of my and others' places in the great scheme of things and to help each other fulfill that place." She sees herself as making "slow, but sure" progress.

Meaning. Susan believes others define meaning primarily in terms of relationships, career, accomplishments and sometimes causes involving politics and social reform. Susan defines meaning for herself as an underlying reason for what you do in the sense of values, a motivation. Purpose is where a person "chooses some things over others because it fits more with their direction." Meaning must be experienced in the present. "If what I am doing now fits with where I am aiming, then that gives meaning." Susan initially found it difficult to talk specifically about what it is that she finds meaningful in her life: "I find it hard to talk about the big things, hard to put into words." It came out as the interview proceeded that Susan experiences meaning primarily through her relationship with God. This experience seems to be mystical in nature in that it is beyond words and reason. When Susan experiences meaning she feels part of "something that's bigger than I am." "I lose who I am as an individual person in order to become part of something that's bigger but when I do that I feel very much an individual." It has a power but not a personal purpose in it. Experiencing meaning has the feeling of "contributing," of "authority," of "knowing who you are," of increased clarity and of feeling alone but "not needy." Susan recalls being on top of a mountain once and experiencing "the sense of being both powerful and small and insignificant at the same time." Susan describes experiencing meaning as "knowing what is important and knowing I would die if I had to, being that committed to what I know." Susan experiences meaning more on an emotional than cognitive level: "Thinking doesn't really fit with meaning, it's more like seeing." Susan often cries when experiencing meaning. "It is very emotional." She goes on to say that when she has been most aware of meaning she has gone beyond crying which is like "an early stage of experiencing meaning." "Crying is like preparation for something after, like a purging. It leads to a place of knowing that you know that you know. . . ." The times of experiencing meaning that Susan describes are infrequent and do not last for a long period of time. In between those times, Susan does not experience meaning. She then feels confused, empty, and needing. It is the feeling of "not being clear about what it is that I really value." At the bottom end of a meaning continuum, Susan experiences depression, lethargy, "wishing you could die," fears, "wanting to escape," and "knowing something is not right." She feels needy but is not sure what she needs. Susan feels that choices she has made in a religious/spiritual context (which usually involve giving up something) have contributed to her experiences of meaning.

Crisis and Change. Susan is not sure where she would rate herself on a scale of change, but says that she is probably average in terms of physical events. She sees her "relationship with the Lord" as having the most impact "in getting on the right track to find meaning." Susan could think of nothing in particular that stands out as being most disruptive. She says that "disruption" doesn't really fit. "Dissatisfactions are all I can think of." What came to mind were things about herself, personality traits, that she doesn't like and sees as being resistant to change. Susan views disruption as things within herself that create the disruption, "not the event itself."

Susan defines crisis as a decision point, a choice that involves change in the sense of a turning point. Crisis brings to mind events such as divorce, end of relationships, suicide and financial problems depending on what is important to a person. Crisis involves choice where something is highly valued and one is faced with the possibility of giving it up. Most of what Susan calls crises have not happened to her though she says there have been important decision-making times. She sees crisis more as external events "that happen to you that put you in a place where you have to deal with what is happening." For Susan it is the inner struggles which stick out in her mind. The main one that comes to mind is a struggle related to her religious faith: "In terms of my relationship with the Lord I had to make some changes . . . other things I wanted and valued were getting in the way. I had this idea of who God was but it was an idea which didn't necessarily correspond with who He was. I had to give up my idea of who He was in order to come to know Him in a way that wasn't attached to how well my mind could understand theories and concepts, to more of an inner sort of knowing." Susan became more aware of what she saw as "conflicting interests," values inconsistent with her faith. She handled it by doing a lot of thinking and coming to the point of realizing that "I don't know what you're doing, there's nothing I'm hearing that I can intellectually understand, but I'm not going to run away from it." During this time she felt "like I wasn't going to make it, scared, determined but "not hopeless." She was aware "almost unconsciously" ("not in my mind but on a different level") that "something was happening." On a physical level Susan did not sleep well and had "knots in her stomach."

Susan feels that she has changed as a result of this time. She has a new way of "relating to the Lord," and became "more alive" in other areas of her life, remembering comments made by people at the time and "felt more of a freedom."

Most helpful during this struggle were a couple of people who were close to Susan who "kind of gave me faith." "I don't remember just what was said, but I got support . . . a strength not to give up." She saw herself as least helpful. This relates to how Susan sees herself as mainly responsible for any struggle in her life.

Susan sees crisis as an external time event with a beginning and an end, whereas she sees suffering as more ongoing. Suffering is a part of life and even a "way of life" for some people. Susan sees suffering as passive in a negative way. The notion of a martyr comes to mind. Compared to others, Susan is not sure where she would rate herself on suffering, saying "maybe in the middle."

If she could change anything in her life to date, Susan would want not to have had to "hit spots where I have to stop and re-clarify values." She would have liked to have more awareness about values and be better able to throw out the ones she does not want.

Relationship Between Meaning and Crisis. Although Susan says she would not use the word "suffering" in the same way as crisis, she says that if one is to find meaning there is a certain amount of suffering involved that cannot be avoided. "In accepting it, it is almost not suffering anymore if you can get to that point, if you can really accept it as part of being alive and not as something you want to avoid. It becomes part of life, part of what you've given yourself to." Susan sees herself as having experienced an average amount of change and no crises. The one struggle that comes to mind was outlined above. She would rate herself in the middle of suffering. Susan experiences moments of meaning separated by longer periods lacking in meaning.

Comments. Susan remarked that the interview made her think and put into words things she had not articulated before.

Case Summary and Themes. Susan experiences times of meaning interspersed with longer periods lacking in meaning. She could think of no crises but rather inner struggles. She has experienced an average amount of change and suffering. One theme that emerges is the inner orientation. Susan talks about dissatisfactions, struggles and disruptions and for the most part suffering as inner states.

Another strong theme is the spiritual, mystical element and the paradox of gain through loss. Related to this is the conflict between different values. The importance of support through struggles is also evident in Susan's experiences.

Subject 5 - Sheila

Purpose in Life Test. Scored 100, which falls in the indecisive range, indicating neither the clear lack nor presence of meaning and purpose. Sheila's aims relate to increasing the "quality" of her life rather than "quantity." Sheila's statements reflect both meaning and ambivalence: "To me all life is . . . meaningful and purposeful," "My life is . . . good but it could be a lot easier," and "My ambitions at this time are not very high as I feel burned out."

Meaning. Sheila believes that others define meaning as "something that makes sense," that is directive and provides satisfaction. It is having a reason for what a person is involved in. Sheila defines meaning "in terms of productivity or return, as well as sense." She thinks of meaning in terms of "what am I doing, where is it getting me, and what are the end results?" She experiences meaning through doing something that "leaves me feeling good," and "from which there is a reward." Something is meaningful if it is "meeting my need." If there is no satisfaction then Sheila sees the experience as a "passing of time" and not having much meaning. Being with people, when it is satisfying and meeting her needs, is meaningful to Sheila. Meaning feels "good," "charged," "identifying with," and "euphoric." Meaninglessness feels "strange," "that something was missed," "frustrating" and "apprehensive." When experiencing meaning Sheila sees herself as acting "more relaxed, open, interested and accepting." If something is meaningful Sheila will spend more time thinking about it, trying to understand it by looking at it from different angles, go into more depth and trying to find application for it in her own life. If something is not meaningful she will "pass it over."

Sheila feels that disappointments of having things not turn out as expected have contributed to meaninglessness. She feels that part of experiencing meaning is realizing that "a lot of life doesn't have much meaning," and realizing as one grows older that some goals will never be accomplished in life. She speaks of the process as a "re-evaluation and letting go of disappointments." Growing older and "wiser" has for Sheila meant changing priorities and valuing "relationships more than material things." Her health has also influenced her experience of meaning "by making me look at things differently, more humanistically." Sheila has been re-evaluating her life for the past couple of months and also "went through a re-evaluation period at the time of my divorce."

Crisis and Change. Compared to others, Sheila rates herself seven or eight on a nine-point scale of change.

Going to university was identified as having the most impact through the knowledge and skills gained and also through the expectations that she sees as going with it. Sheila feels she is "expected to perform and behave differently," finds it difficult to find "professional/business" types to mix with in her social life. She also thinks that education "has separated me from my family in that I'm the only one to have taken this route. They don't often understand what I'm doing and why."

Sheila identifies her health, frustration with graduate studies and the break-up of a relationship as having been most disruptive. All were experienced as unpleasant. The effect of the relationship break-up was a "more cautious attitude and loss of trust." Sheila has learned more about herself through the disruption. The effect of health problems has led to "further evaluation of my life, of what do I do from here?" "I will have to get involved in less stressful situations which may mean changing my life style."

Sheila defines crisis as "very traumatic things beyond normal, such as divorce, separation and accidents," but also includes "events such as marriage and having a baby." Divorce is the main crisis that comes to mind for Sheila. At this point her life took a different direction. She says the main part of the crisis lasted for about two to three months before and about eight months after the divorce. It took about a year to get "over the main hurdle" and become more functional. Sheila handled the crisis initially by denying that anything was wrong: "I hadn't said a word to anyone until he actually moved out." She kept what was happening to herself and felt like "it was the end." "I wasn't suicidal but felt like everything had dropped out of my life." She experienced lack of sleep, hallucinations and didn't eat. She felt "empty" and that "nothing else mattered." She questioned "Why us?" and "tried to stay as together as I could." Sheila found social contacts and "having to go through the process of explaining" her situation to others especially difficult. Sheila sees herself as having changed as a direct result of the crisis. She re-evaluated her life, changed her perspective on relationships expecting the other person to bring more to the relationship than she used to expect and said "it's time to do something for myself." After the divorce she went to university. She realized how dependent she had been and became more independent.

Most helpful to Sheila during crisis times have been emotional and financial support from her extended family. Least helpful was advice from people. "It is better if one is allowed to sort it out on her own. Sheila thinks it would have been more helpful for her "not to take life so seriously and have more fun." Also, to let go of the past and worry less about the outcome of things. She thinks that messages from her mother, who saw herself as "quite powerless" such as "Don't do this, you'll embarrass people," and "Children should be quiet not boisterous," contributed to her becoming inhibited and "an adult before I should have been."

Sheila sees crisis as an external thing and suffering as a way of handling things that can be self-imposed. Her divorce involved suffering but not all crises that she has experienced, for example, marriage. Compared to others she would rate herself five on a nine-point scale of suffering.

If she could change anything about her life to date, Sheila would have worked less hard and had more fun.

Relationship Between Meaning and Crisis. Sheila rates herself high on change and experiences both meaning and lack of meaning in her life. Sheila sees herself as having changed in a positive direction as a result of most of the crises and disruption she has experienced with the exception of relationships from which she feels more distrustful and cautious.

Comments. Sheila found the interview interesting and comfortable. Some questions she says were hard to answer on the "spur of the moment."

Case Summary and Themes. Sheila experiences both meaning and meaninglessness in her life, and seems to be in a time of transition and re-evaluation at present. She defines meaning primarily in terms of feeling satisfied and productive. Re-evaluation has been a recurrent theme during times of crisis and disruption. Sheila's attitudes toward life experiences often have the quality of seriousness and worry. She tends to deal with crises by keeping what is happening to herself and trying to appear "together." Sheila would like to find "someone to spend the rest of my life with," but sees herself as having grown more distrustful and cautious in relationships.

Subject 6 - Shirley

Purpose in Life Test. Scored 100, which falls in the indecisive range indicating neither the clear lack nor presence of meaning and purpose. In the written section, Shirley seems to express a high degree of meaning through statements such as: "I get bored . . . seldom," "My life is . . . better than a lot of other people's," and "I have achieved . . . a good reputation as a teacher." She sees herself as having been successful especially with career aims, but has not yet achieved what is important to her in other areas. She wants to get married and says that her highest aspiration is to have a child, though she says she is almost too old to have children.

Meaning. Shirley thinks that what meaning is for others depends on the country they live in and their life experiences. She thinks most people define meaning as "a reason for being here," "finding things that make you happy or satisfied," the "how to live" and "what is valued." Shirley defines meaning for herself as "having a goal," "thinking there's a reason for being here" and having goals to work toward. She says that feeling wanted and worthwhile, having a good self-esteem and helping people are all important to her and, if achieved, put meaning into her life. Shirley finds it meaningful to be able to "stimulate my mind and be challenged," and to help others: "If I manage to help one child through the year I feel like I've really done something worthwhile." She also says that her parents have a lot of meaning for her and that she feels very close to them.

Shirley experiences meaning as "positive," "stable," "satisfied," "content," and "purposeful." She experiences meaning more when she is involved in different aspects of life rather than narrowed and also thinks that it relates to how she feels about herself. With meaning she is more "positive" and is more emotionally involved with people. Meaning is also experienced physically with more energy and as a teenager as "tingling sensations up my arms." When not experiencing meaning, Shirley feels "at loose ends," "dissatisfied," "lack of direction," "procrastinating," and "depressed." Shirley adds that she has not come to "conclusions about meaningful relationships and love between people." She says she is not sure what love is, except that she knows she experiences it from her parents. Regarding relationships, Shirley says, "I think I'm not too trusting in some ways. There are so many breakdowns in society, and I've been brought up with the idea that marriage is lasting. I'm not sure I have that capability. That's really bothered me."

Shirley says she came to experience meaning through a breakdown several years ago. She started crying uncontrollably and was told by her doctor to leave work. She was off work for about eight weeks. During this time she learned how she "tends to overdo things, get over-involved and over-concerned." She says that meaning came through support from friends, learning "I'm the most important person in my life," and learning how to take less on and become more aware of when she is becoming tense.

Crisis and Change. Shirley would rate herself toward the bottom end of the scale. "I haven't been exposed to a lot of change." Going to Europe for two years, her parents and her breakdown are all seen as having had impact but going to Europe is seen as having the most. Shirley feels that "If I had stayed here I would have gotten married, had kids, done the usual thing." By going away she felt she became more independent, more tolerant, little things don't bother her as much as they used to, and she was able to improve herself financially.

Shirley identifies her mother's illness, her breakdown and relationships with men as having been most disruptive. She says she is less inclined to take long trips and perhaps move to another city as she might if it were not for the fact that she feels her father needs her support. Both her mother's illness and her breakdown were times of re-evaluation and asking questions about "what the main purpose is?" Although the disruptions were unpleasant in that

Shirley "likes things to be on an even keel," she sees them as "times of learning and of thinking about life more."

Shirley defines crisis as "coming against an event that you have little control over" and "find extremely hard to handle." Examples of crises that came to mind were illness, death of someone close and divorce. What is central is the lack of control over what's happening. Shirley feels that control is the main difference between crisis and non-crisis, the helpless element in crisis. She identified both her mother's illness and her breakdown as crises in her life though qualifies the latter: "In a way I did have control but hadn't accepted it." She does not see herself as in a crisis at present because her mother is "relatively healthy," and the breakdown is no longer a crisis though the impact is long-lasting." During crises Shirley feels "helpless," "uptight," and "supported." As a result of the crises she has learned to cry. "It was part of our family tradition that you didn't show your feelings." She has also learned "to say 'I love you,'" and about the importance of communication in her relationships with men. "I'm very much afraid to show my feelings to people I really like."

Shirley sees the support received from family and friends during crises as most helpful. It helped her to have them "to talk to, to say you're important and to care." Least helpful was having people around who she didn't know well, who didn't mean anything to her. Shirley says that her mother would say it would have been more helpful to have religion, but Shirley thinks that the most important thing is to let people know you're there and that you care.

Shirley sees suffering as more long-term as compared to crisis, which she views as more sudden. Compared to others, she sees herself as having suffered very little. "I've been very lucky, had lots of friends, generally good health, financial security and supportive parents."

Shirley says that if she could change anything, she would have moved in with an old boyfriend who asked her to live with him. At the time she didn't because she knew her parents wouldn't approve.

Relationship Between Meaning and Crisis. Although Shirley sees herself as having experienced relatively little crisis and change, she sees her experience of meaning as directly connected with the crisis and disruption she has experienced. These have been times of learning and re-evaluation for her.

Comments. Shirley found it difficult to talk about her mother's illness. Overall she found the interview "thought-provoking" and says that she enjoyed it.

Case Summary and Themes. Shirley experiences some meaning in her life, but has not yet achieved some of her goals, especially in the area of relationships, that is, being married and being a mother. She has experienced crises related to illness and to an emotional breakdown. She has also found relationships with men disruptive. Spending a couple of years overseas is seen as a major influence.

Through crises Shirley has learned how to better express her emotions and to be closer to people. A common theme for Shirley is the importance of the support she receives from family and friends, and especially the closeness she has with her parents. Uncertainty about relationships and lack of intimacy is another theme. Shirley is not sure she has the ability to have a trusting, committed relationship.

Subject 7 - Frank

Purpose in Life Test. Scored 123, which suggests clear purpose and meaning. Statements also reflect clear aims and presence of meaning: "My life is . . . . exciting" and "To me all life is . . . wonderful." His aims are to "complete his degree, work in his chosen field, have two children, be materially well off and have a happy and satisfying home life." "All aspects are either close to being complete or well under control."

Meaning. Frank says that meaning refers to how people spend their time and, depending on the person, can be religious, professional, family or recreational. He distinguishes between an operational definition and a philosophical definition saying that how a person spends his time may or may not correspond with what he sees as his meaning in life. Meaning in life for Frank involves "things that give me a feeling of self-worth . . . those things I value." Frank sees his family, career and free time as meaningful in that order.

Frank says that people probably don't talk about experiencing meaning, but rather in terms of feeling good. Frank experiences meaning as feeling good and doing what he values rather than what is valued and expected by other people. He feels involved and enthusiastic. If something has meaning, it "seems like less work." It is "pleasurable" and "exhilarating." Things not meaningful are done out of "obligation," and are sometimes void of affect. They are like "going through the motions." The experience of meaninglessness requires more conscious effort to complete a task. There is more "tiredness if you're not into something."

Frank is not sure how he has come to experience meaning: It is "a lifetime of experience but not any one thing I can put my finger on." He thinks that university may have something to do with his experience of meaning: "If I had not snuck in the back door and gone to university I might be working on a subway somewhere" and experiencing meaninglessness. It was during university that he discovered new interests, and developed more self-confidence. Prior to university and moving away from home, he did not experience meaning in the sense of feeling highly involved as he does at present: "In high school I was just putting in time, I didn't feel like I belonged there."

Crisis and Change. Compared to others, Frank sees himself as having experienced a lot of change. He rates himself eight on a nine-point scale. He sees moving a lot as having had the most impact on his life to date. His father was in a job which required many moves. "By the time I was in Grade 13, I had lived in 17 or 18 different houses." With the exception of the first couple of moves, when Frank was five and seven years old, he looked forward to moving. The most difficult part was leaving friends, but Frank says it was easy to make new friends, especially if he moved during a school year. His classmates were in pretty much the same situation. Although leaving friends was sometimes hard, Frank viewed moving as an adventure. Frank says that unlike some people he is not apprehensive about moving to new places: "If you don't leave family, they'll leave you, it's just been my experience that everybody's moving all the time."

The most recent disruption that comes to mind for Frank is being called on during the night by tenants of the building where he works. Further back, he identifies a time when he was in high school during which his mother was hospitalized for attempting suicide. She has long been a "victim of depression." Frank was present when his mother "tried to take a knife to herself." Frank says he was shook up by the incident but that it was "something that I just adjusted to." "It's just the way things are, you've got your own problems and can't live with other people's as well." Although aware of the situation, Frank is not sure that is affected his life.

Frank defines a crisis as a "situation that arises for whatever reason that threatens your functioning and lifestyle that you have defined as comfortable." Frank says that some events are crises for most people, such as death of a family member, but what constitutes crisis for some people, such as job promotions or moves, are not crises for him. He sees crises as unexpected events that upset a person's lifestyle.

Frank says that his mother's suicide attempt was a critical period but that it "didn't really change the way I lived." A more recent experience when his father was hospitalized also caused concern but it was "a concern I lived with and didn't change the way I lived." Frank's experience of the "critical period" with his mother is elaborated upon: Frank went to visit her a couple of times a week in the hospital, talked about it a little but says that his life went on as usual. "I don't think anything particularly changed." He felt "relief" when she went to the hospital feeling it was the best place for her to be. He also experienced "helplessness," was a "little scared," and probably experienced "knots in his stomach" though he doesn't remember. Frank comments that "I didn't completely understand the situation. I was a rebellious little bugger and this was an imposition on my freedom and lifestyle and the way I wanted to do things." He does not see himself as having changed as a result of this incident.

Most helpful during this time was "having a good group of friends to be with and do things to get my mind away from it." Frank can't recall anything unhelpful.

Frank sees a distinction between suffering and crisis. Crisis is an event which may or may not be accompanied by suffering. He thinks of suffering mainly as physical but adds that "emotional suffering can come from a crisis." Frank says that suffering was not involved in the situation with his mother. Rather, it was a time of disruption and feeling helpless. Compared to others, Frank does not see himself as having suffered. He would rate himself one on a nine-point scale.

If he could change anything about his life to date, Frank would like not to have had to develop self-confidence which he feels has been "a big obstacle." He would also change his physical appearance during high school. "I had a bad case of acne which affected my self-confidence." On "a practical level" he would change little. He says it "would have been nice to sow a few more wild oats when 18, and have a few more memories," but concludes that "it's been a pretty good shake, I got a good draw."

Relationship Between Meaning and Crisis. Frank experiences a high degree of meaning and purpose in his life and has experienced much change. He sees himself as having experienced no crises, only disruptions, and says he has experienced relatively no suffering. Frank sees himself for the most part as unaffected by the disruption he has been exposed to.

Comments. None.

Case Summary and Themes. Frank has clearly identified goals and experiences a high degree of meaning and purpose in his life. He has experienced a lot of change and some disruption but nothing he would call a crisis. Meaning is defined and experienced primarily in terms of feeling good about what he is doing and having it contribute to high self-esteem. Frank has a matter-of-fact "that's just the way things are" attitude toward life. The main theme that emerges is how Frank sees himself as having been unaffected by disruption and change in his life.

Subject 8 - Diane

Purpose in Life Test. Scored 124, suggesting clear meaning and purpose. Written comments reflect a great deal of involvement with life: "My life is . . . too short to do all I would like to do," "I have achieved . . . a coming to terms with myself," "I have achieved . . . some of my goals," "I am continuing to achieve goals even as they change" and "To grow in knowledge is my greatest ambition."

Meaning. Diane finds it difficult to generalize to other people but says that how people define meaning varies from person to person and depends on their education, cultural and life experiences. Most of the people she knows view meaning similarly to Diane. Diane defines meaning in terms of how "productive" and "self-satisfying" her life is, how "authentic" her relationships are with others and the "immortality" she leaves. Diane defines immortality not in terms of life after death, but as "leaving something tangible behind," "in a way that I might touch other people's lives," "making a positive contribution, so that your life will have had some meaning, some reason for existing." Diane experiences meaning primarily through her "intellectual, cognitive abilities" which allow her to "explore, learn and reflect," "put things together" and relate to people in ways she would not be able to without these abilities. Being able to "read and question," "to have awarenesses and to . . . internalize and explore experiences" is especially important to Diane. Her thinking abilities "add a great deal of meaning." "If my brain were destroyed I would have no urge to live at all."

Diane experiences the difference between experiencing meaning and meaninglessness as distinct. Meaning "feels right," "feels good," it is a "flash of insight," an "aha." It is "reinforcing" in that "you know what it feels like and want to experience it again." The recognition of meaning is sudden and abrupt, and comes only if the "mind is ready to receive it." Experiencing meaning is "doing something, feeling good about it and feeling you have control over it." It is important to have "the experience or belief that you have free will, that you have control." "If you don't have some feeling of control, free will over your life at least to some degree that's satisfactory, then I don't think you can experience meaning." Meaning is "like a high," an "energizing experience." Your thinking processes function better and are "either on or off." Diane doesn't "see a middle ground." Either a person experiences meaning or meaninglessness. The difference between the two she sees "in almost visual terms" like "springtime and winter" and "sunshine and death and darkness." People who experience meaning are physically healthier than people who experience no meaning. Meaninglessness is feeling "no control" and "powerless to do anything about my situation." Depression is a feeling of meaninglessness, a feeling of "lack of control and power." When experiencing meaninglessness a person's faculties don't function as well.

Diane feels she has come to experience meaning through several important influences. She had a "secure childhood," "knew she was loved" and grew up in a rural area "early in touch with nature" and "with cycles and rituals of the passing of the seasons." Diane had a close relationship with grandparents on both sides of her family who "taught me that knowledge was important," "instructed me in their own kinds of value systems" and "gave me a good foundation." Diane says that "real self-examination" began when she was doing undergraduate work while experiencing the breakup of her marriage. The influence of a professor was a major help during this time period of self-reflection, re-evaluation and questioning. Diane sees this time of reflection as important even though it was sometimes painful, but says she "probably would not have done it without the guidance of a professor who had already examined his own values." He was "a guide in my search." He helped her to "clarify my thinking." Diane saw him as "authentic, real, honest, learned" and had a great deal of respect for his integrity. Through this examination of herself and her values, Diane came "through to an understanding of what I valued and what was meaningful to me." She then made decisions in light of her new learnings and acted accordingly.

Crisis and Change. Diane sees herself as having experienced a lot of change and rates herself eight on a nine-point scale as compared to others.

She sees learning and the "gaining of knowledge" as outlined in the section on meaning as having had the most impact on her life to date.

Most disruptive has been "stopping to do graduate work," "doing now what others did a long time ago." She sees it as a "good experience" in that she "planned for it" and sees it as "something I must do." The effects have been both positive and negative stimulation. The positive aspect is that it is giving her credentials to do what she wants to do, and the negative side is that she finds some of it disappointing. She sees some of the educational system as "closing down" rather than making for "more broad-minded thinking and questioning."

Diane defines crisis as "something that can at the time be viewed as life-threatening." She clarifies that life-threatening refers not only to physical aspecs but threatening of whatever is meaningful. Loss of parents, divorce, and loss of a child are cited as examples of crises. Diane has experienced crises through the death of a parent and her grandparents, and through divorce. The death of her mother and grandparents didn't disrupt her life for long periods of time though the "memories stay." The divorce crisis lasted two or three years because of "coming to terms" and working it through prior to leaving and then the legal proceedings. Diane handled the marriage breakup by evaluating the situation, making her decision, acting on it and using her knowledge and strengths. She "struggled through it." Diane sees herself as having been able to deal with the crisis more easily because "I know that I'm a survivor and that I have certain survival skills such as being articulate, and having intellectual skills and physical and emotional strengths that perhaps other women don't have." During the divorce, Diane felt "as horrible as is probably possible for me to feel" and experienced "every gamut of emotions." Sometimes she felt "total despair," and "impotent feeling of rage," felt "powerless to have any effect on another person's actions," feeling like "it would never end" and sometimes "thinking that death or anything would be preferred." Diane says that she is glad she had the financial and emotional ability to deal with legal frustrations. Diane found it more difficult to think clearly when feeling "distressed" or "depressed" and also experienced weight loss. Diane says that positive and negative feelings "balanced each other out pretty much." She feels lucky to have had good friends. "In moments of despair there was always somebody there that I could draw on if I needed support." Diane also found that "in myself internally even at the very bottom levels there was always strength inside of me." She feels that this relates to the early influence of her grandparents who taught her that "you don't give up," "whatever you do you do well" and that "you can always do what you set out to do."

The crises of losing her grandparents and her mother through death was experienced somewhat differently than her divorce. Diane feels that the deaths were easier to deal with because of their finality. "You have no ongoing need to deal with it. Since I don't believe in an afterlife, I don't think of having to go and light candles and pray for their souls . . . with marriage you know that the person is still living and it is more unfinished, not as final." Diane also felt "powerless" and there was a "wishing that it didn't occur," as well as feeling very sad. With her mother's death she felt mixed feelings as she was glad that she died without suffering.

Diane sees herself as having changed in ways she would not have had she not experienced the crises. She has "more of a sense of who I am," "self-reliance," and has come more to terms "with the fact that we are all alone." She says she likes herself well enough to enjoy being alone and also likes to be with other people. Diane says she has also become "more independent" even though she sees herself as always having been an independent person. Diane says she would not have learned what she did without the crises.

Most helpful to Diane during times of crises was "thinking" which was both "a curse and a blessing." She thinks through everything but "can not turn it off," "my mind will not let it be." Diane also sees family and the "few close friends" that love her as having been very important in crises. Most helpful has been the "confines of society" such as having to obtain certain credentials to get certain jobs.

Diane distinguishes between crisis and suffering in that she sees crisis as an event and suffering has connotations of being physical and long-term. Defined in this way she says that suffering has not been involved in her crises. Compared to most people, she says that she has had both emotional and physical pain, but would not use the word suffering. "Suffering seems passive. Pain is active."

If she could live her life over again she would complete her education earlier, would not get married so young and would travel "to every country in the world."

Relationship Between Meaning and Crisis. Diane experiences a great deal of meaning and purpose in her life and sees herself as having experienced much change. She has identified several crises without which she says she would not have changed and learned as she did. Although crisis and disruption were often experienced as unpleasant, Diane sees good as having come from all of these experiences.

Comments. Diane says she participated in the study because "I feel it is important for everyone to experience meaning."

Case Summary and Themes. Diane experiences a high degree of meaning and has experienced much change, disruption and crisis in her life. She sees herself as having changed in a positive way as a result of these experiences. Several themes emerge: Diane has a great deal of confidence in herself and sees herself as having many inner resources and "survival skills." She highly values her intellectual abilities and not only uses these abilities to help her through difficult times, but also experiences a great deal of meaning from this aspect of her life. Diane has an active rather than passive attitude toward life and sees herself as having free will and control over her life. She believes this is necessary for the experience of meaning. The theme of support systems also emerges. Diane describes a very close relationship with her family and sees the support and love she received from them as instrumental in her development. Diane has always had a few close friends. Both family and friends have always been important to Diane.

Subject 9 - Elaine

Purpose in Life Test. Scored 130, suggesting clear meaning and purpose. The written portion of the PIL reflects the same in statements such as: "My life is . . . very full and meaningful," "I have achieved . . . many of my lifetime goals," "the whole purpose of my life . . . has been focused upon development," and "To me all life is . . . valuable." Elaine sees her aims and "lifetime ambitions" as "tied to my family and my career."

Meaning. Elaine believes that others define meaning as "whether life seems to have a purpose" and "whether or not they are contributing to someone or something." How a person defines meaning would depend on their level of education. Elaine defines meaning for herself as having "goals that provide direction," and having her life be "purposeful in terms of being directed toward helping someone or becoming a better person." Elaine experiences meaning through her husband and extended family. Family has always been important to Elaine. She keeps in close touch with members of her extended family and finds that their "caring is meaingful, and the realization that there is a large group of people who love me, and are aware of and interested in what I am doing."

Elaine found the questions relating to the difference between the experience of meaning and meaninglessness difficult to answer. She has a "hard time understanding someone who would wake up in the morning and experience little direction." Elaine says that her "nature is to seek out the experience of meaning." "The closest thing I can think of is when something is not sitting right in my mind as in lack of understanding." Elaine says that even in this situation she would "mull it over" rather than "let it sit and be meaningless." Elaine describes the experience of meaning as a "good feeling." Elaine has "no recollection of any time when there wasn't meaning." She sees her family as having contributed to her experience of meaning: They are "very much doers, people who are involved with others and in the community, and in learning. They don't stand back and view life, but live it. People who 'view' life have never played an important part in my life."

Crisis and Change. Elaine sees her life as having been placid compared to others and would rate herself four on a nine-point scale of change. She sees the death of her mother and the death of relatives which made her parents guardians of their children as having affected her life "but at no time did they make it unstable." She felt and grieved the loss of her mother but says that "it didn't really upset my life." Education and her father have had the most impact on Elaine's life. Elaine sees a relationship between the two in that her father "showed interest and gave encouragement."

Most disruptive to date for Elaine has been course work. She finds it "all-consuming" and says that she gets "involved to the ninth degree" in whatever she does. She adds that the word "disruption" does not really fit as graduate studies have been pleasant. Elaine takes a very pragmatic, matter-of-fact approach to dealing with pressures. She "recognizes what's involved" and "makes decisions accordingly."

Elaine defines a crisis as a "situation that appears suddenly or is cumulative to the point of requiring some action." She recalls one crisis in her life when she went to university after high school for nursing and found she disliked it. She had wanted to go into nursing since she was a child and says that it was a crisis when she found out she disliked it and had to make a decision. It began in September and by November she realized she had "taken the wrong turn." "They were giving me tranquilizers" and "I had never had a situation like that." Elaine experienced the crisis as feeling "lost" as "I get meaning by knowing where I am going, having structure and goals."

Elaine sees herself as having matured because of the crisis. Before this experience she "was quite sheltered, had never worked at a job before . . . and had a protected background." She developed "increased independence" and had for the first time to "rely on people out of my family."

Most helpful during this time were the "people around that really seemed to care." Their understanding and acceptance "really stays in my mind." Least helpful was that Elaine prolonged the crisis by staying in the situation when she knew it wasn't for her. If she had it to do over, Elaine would have worked in a hospital first to find out more about nursing before entering nursing school.

Elaine sees a distinction between crisis and suffering in that a crisis is sudden and requires an action whereas suffering is "more of a condition." Also, crisis has an element of suffering in it, but a person can suffer without being in a crisis. Elaine says that she suffered physically and mentally during the crisis she experienced. Compared to most people, Elaine would rate herself three on a nine-point scale of suffering.

If she could live her life over again, Elaine would change the fact that "my husband and I can't have family." She adds that the fact that they can't have family is "not upsetting my life, I wouldn't say I'm suffering from it."

Relationship Between Meaning and Crisis. Elaine experiences a high degree of meaning in her life and sees herself as having experienced very little change, disruption and crisis. Compared to others she also feels that she has not experienced much suffering. Disruption has had little effect on Elaine and the crisis period she says she "really grew from." "If I had the choice to remove it from my experience I would leave it there because I grew from it." "It's not something that sits heavily with me."

Comments. Elaine says that she could not talk about the answers to interview questions without revealing a lot about herself, but that she did not find it threatening.

Case Summary and Themes. Elaine experiences a high degree of meaning and has experienced relatively little change and crisis in her life. She sees herself as having grown from the crisis she has experienced. Elaine does not recall ever experiencing meaninglessness. Elaine takes a pragmatic approach to her life experiences as if to say, "this is the way it is, let's deal with it." The importance of family ties and the support received from them is a major theme. Another theme is how Elaine characterizes herself as a "doer." She portrays an active rather than passive involvement with life.

Subject 10 - Bev

Purpose in Life Test. Scored 130, suggesting clear purpose and meaning. Written comments reflect the same: "My life is . . . full and satisfying," "I have achieved . . . a satisfaction in coming to terms with myself," and "I am accomplishing . . . my goals and aspirations." Most of Bev's goals relate to education and to improving "my role as a wife and mother and as a caring individual to all I meet."

Meaning. Bev believes that others see meaning as "something deep that has come to light for them, enlightened them, uncovered something, not in a mystical but rational sense." Bev defines meaning similarly for herself. She says that meaning is "like uncovering a treasure that's very dear even though you're not sure of its value. There's an awareness inside of you that there's meaning." Meaning is "an insight," "an understanding on a deep level" that enriches you because you have "uncovered it." Bev says that great teachers share it with their students and that it is "more than a cognitive process." It "goes beyond." "It transcends." Bev relates an incident that was meaningful at a retreat seminar with a group of people: "We were on a walk one evening by a lake. It was still and moonrays cast on the water giving a sheen to the lake. It was very beautiful. Everyone stopped at the same moment and no one spoke. There must have been 80 in the group. There was a hushed sense of silence, of beauty and of nature. It was a meaningful moment, an emotional moment. We were all different from that experience. We shared something together."

Bev experiences meaning in "all kinds of ways," including through people, nature, walking and beauty. Examples of meaningful experiences include challenging and stimulating class discussions, knowing you only have a couple of dollars in your pocket and the learning about dependence on money that comes from that, and reliving childhood experiences through walks to school. "The crunch of leaves underfoot, the smell, the crispness of the snow, and frozen breath on my scarf and frost on my eyelashes." "These are meaningful if reflected upon." Bev also says she experiences meaning through an "awareness of my life world" and "some kind of communication with and awareness of everything in my life world." Also through the "things I touch and the people I interact with."

Bev experiences meaning as an "awareness." "Sometimes meaning is not experienced until it is reflected upon and then it is recognized." Bev's thinking is "really on, keen, sharpened" when she experiences meaning. Meaning is "emotional." Bev says she can get "revved up and excited." Bev did not describe meaninglessness. She says "I may get a little down, but I don't really understand what depression is. I've never really been depressed."

Bev believes that experiencing meaning has "a lot to do with religious faith." She has come to experience meaning by "believing in what can not be comprehended rationally, by recognizing deep inside and having an inner awareness of something greater than man." She says that "experiencing and leaning on this is the most meaningful thing in life. That's where I nail my foundation." Bev says that by having an awareness of her "smallness" she has more "power" to understand and empathize with people, and is "not so troubled by every little problem and wave that comes."

As well as her faith, Bev also sees her family as having contributed to her experience of meaning. "My father has a marvelous attitude about life. My mother is vivacious, full of zest, hard-working and a great support for me. If I called for them to come they would be here in 24 hours." Bev also sees her "self-examination and reflection" as contributing to her experience of meaning. "I am trying always to be aware of what is really important in life and why I am doing what I am doing." Bev sees her self-confidence as another factor.

Crisis and Change. Bev would rate herself four on a nine-point scale of change. She adds that the changes she has experienced have always been when she wanted them.

"Life, experiences and daily exploration" have had the most impact on Bev. She cannot think of any one thing that she would say has made for special impact. Bev's attitude is that "Every day's a new day."

Bev is not sure what has been most disruptive in her life to date. She says that coming to Edmonton for graduate studies has been disruptive but that it was planned for and is a pleasant experience. The disruption of coming to Edmonton has no identified effects. Bev handles "such changes like a job." She "works during the day and then leaves it behind."

Bev defines a crisis as "something that would disrupt a person's life to the point where they can't make sense of what's going on." Crisis also has an unexpected quality to it. A crisis would be deepened by "loss of meaning." Bev cites death and accidents as examples of crisis. Bev says she has experienced little crisis. All that came to mind was a "minor health crisis" when she was admitted to the hospital for tests. This was "more of a crisis for others" than for Bev, who was not worried. Bev says that the person in the crisis might be in a "better position to deal with it than those around." Bev handled this situation by "doing what I would normally do" and "does not recall feeling down." Bev feels she changed from this experience by gaining more sensitivity to people with the possibility of serious illness.

Most helpful to Bev during this time was her religious faith. Her faith "carried her through" and was strengthened by the experience. She also "recognized that worry would not help." Friends were also an important support. Bev says she has always "relied on friends" and that the "warmth of friendship" is important to her. "I've always had lots of support from friends."

Bev sees a difference between crisis and suffering in that crisis is often unexpected and people attach suffering to a crisis sometimes unnecessarily. "Suffering is sometimes self-imposed." Bev feels that she has the strength to overcome suffering and believes that it "has to do with the mental hold you take on things, and decide that you are not going to be rendered useless by the suffering you are going through." "What is suffering for one person is not for another, for example, some people suffer through an exam." Bev sees herself as having been "fairly free of suffering" and rates herself two or three on a nine-point scale of suffering as compared to others.

If she could change anything in her life to date, Bev would not change anything. "I've enjoyed life, had good and bad times but wouldn't change anything."

Relationship Between Meaning and Crisis. Bev experiences a high degree of meaning and sees herself as having been exposed to little change, crisis and disruption. The small amount of crisis she has been exposed to, Bev sees as having heightened her awareness.

Comments. Bev described the interview as fun, non-threatening and a learning experience.

Case Summary and Themes. Bev experiences a high degree of meaning in her life, primarily through her religious faith. She has experienced little change, disruption and crisis. Bev sees her parents and her high level of self-confidence as influential in her experience of meaning. Self-examination is another theme that Bev sees as tied to her experience of meaning. Bev does not talk of experiencing meaninglessness, saying she never really feels depressed. The support of close friends has been especially helpful to Bev during the time of crisis she described. Bev's overriding attitude, which she sees herself as choosing though not always consciously, is one of optimism.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The main objective of this study was to investigate in the lives of 10 individuals the relationship between a deepened sense of meaning and crisis, and to identify in this relationship factors that differentiate individuals who experience meaning from individuals who do not.

In order to accomplish this, Crumbaugh & Maholick's (1977) Purpose in Life Test was given to 40 graduate students in The Faculty of Education at The University of Alberta. From this population, the five highest and five lowest scoring individuals on meaning were selected for in-depth interviews.

It can be concluded from the results of this study that crisis is an opportunity for a deepened experience of meaning but not a guarantee. Some people like Frank (Subject 7) are relatively unaffected by crisis. Others like Lynn (Subject 3) experience the effects of crisis as devastating. Yet others like Diane (Subject 8) experience a deepened sense of meaning through crisis. Some insight into why these differences exist may be provided through a discussion of how meaning and crisis are defined by individuals, and of themes emerging from this study.

The way individuals define and experience meaning and crisis is relevant to the question of the relationship between meaning and crisis. Both meaning and crisis, as described by participants in the present study, are for the most part consistent with the concepts of meaning and crisis as outlined in the literature review.

Meaning

Though each person defined meaning in his or her own way, there are similarities. Meaning tends to be defined in terms of goals, purpose, direction, satisfaction, motivation and understanding. The concept of understanding includes a person's ability to make sense of their experience in a broader context, to put into perspective, to find a reason for their experience of crisis. Individuals who see themselves as experiencing meaning have more clearly defined goals and a greater sense of anticipation of the future than do individuals who see themselves as experiencing little meaning. High-meaning individuals have something to look forward to and low-meaning individuals seem to have difficulty seeing beyond the present. This is not meant to imply that high-meaning individuals are always living in the future. Rather, high-meaning individuals delineate future plans and broader life goals and values by which they seem better able to enjoy life more fully in the present. This is in contrast to those individuals who live in the present as if it is still the past.

The experience of meaning is often one of well-being. Diane (Subject 8) suggests that people who experience meaning are physically healthier than those who experience no meaning.

Frankl's idea that meaning can be experienced through work, values such as love and beauty or through choosing one's attitude toward circumstances is consistent with the description of meaning provided by participants. Work and relationships are especially common sources of meaning for participants in this study.

The description and definitions of crisis provided by participants are similar to the way crisis theorists view crisis, as outlined in the literature review.

Crisis

As is the case for meaning, crisis is defined and experienced uniquely by each person, but similarities also emerge. Crises are most often described as disruptive, often unexpected, sudden events such as death, divorce or illness that make demands on a person's resources. They require action to cope. Crises are often seen as threatening to a person's usual way of being. An individual in crisis sometimes feels helpless and powerless.

Although crisis most often brings to mind external events, some participants also describe crisis as a turning point, a decision point. Some distinguish between externally and internally-precipitated crises. Crises, like the experience of lack of meaning, are usually accompanied by physical discomfort and somatic complaints. These definitions of crisis are similar to the way crisis is conceptualized by crisis and related theorists as outlined in Chapter II.

The experience of and response to crisis varied from person to person even though some common themes tended to emerge. The unique individual differences that emerged between participants cautions against making broad generalizations. The importance of the therapist approaching each client with a fresh open attitude rather than a preconceived textbook case mentality is also emphasized. Unlike crisis literature, which tends to describe the duration of a crisis as lasting four to six weeks, the duration of crisis was found to vary between participants. Some participants describe crisis as lasting for several months or longer, and for some such as Heather (Subject 2), crisis seems to be an ongoing lifestyle.

Most participants distinguish between crisis and suffering, and see crisis more as an event and suffering more as an ongoing chronic, often physical condition. Suffering also tends to be viewed more negatively, in the sense of being self-imposed, as compared to crises, which are more often seen as precipitated by external events. It is interesting to note that none of the participants, when asked what they would change about their lives, identified crisis or suffering as something they would choose to eliminate.

During crisis, discomfort and pain is experienced, but retrospectively, crisis tends to be seen as a time of learning.

Emergent Themes

The relationship between meaning and crisis is difficult to determine given the individuality with which meaning and crisis are defined and experienced. However, identifiable themes have emerged in the case studies that appear to distinguish individuals who experience meaning from those who do not. The ordering of themes is no reflection of their importance, and will be discussed as follows: (a) Support Systems; (b) Control and Freedom of Choice; (c) Paradox of Gain Through Loss, Self-Transcendence and Self-Concept; (d) Levels of Meaning; and (e) Levels of Sensitivity. Some implications of this study for counselling will then be suggested.

Support Systems. The degree of support that people receive, whether through family, friends or partners, is a major difference between those who come through crisis to a deepened sense of meaning and those who come through crisis to increased meaninglessness. Individuals who describe themselves as experiencing little meaning seem to have fewer supports and less intimacy in their lives than those who experience meaning. The first few subjects in this study who experience less meaning also do not seem to utilize available support systems to the same degree as Subjects 7 through 10. Subjects 1 through 6 would be more typically described as shy, introspective and introverted as compared to Subjects 7 through 10.

How a person utilizes available support systems, not only their presence, appears to be especially important to whether or not a person experiences a deepened sense of meaning through crisis. Paradoxically, support systems can be utilized in either a positive or negative manner. They can serve as a resource to help a person make sense of their experience of crisis. As well, they can provide strength and encouragement while a person rallies his own resources to face the crisis. It is in this sense that some individuals appear to utilize their support systems as a catalyst toward a deepened sense of meaning, while others develop a negative dependence upon support systems. They abandon their sense of personal control and responsibility. When therapists and friends of the person in crisis allow themselves to be used as a support in the second sense, the effect can be one of discouraging a person's sense of control and responsibility. This can lessen their chances of experiencing a deepened sense of meaning. The above notwithstanding, this does not diminish the importance of the therapist assuming temporary control of some acute crisis situations such as potential suicide. However, even acute crisis intervention need not preclude an emphasis on personal responsibility. Support and responsibility are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Control and Freedom of Choice. Meaninglessness is accompanied by a powerless attitude, an attitude that seems to say, "That's just the way things are," and that sees few alternatives. There is a passivity and a tendency to see oneself as controlled by externals. Individuals who experience meaning express a sense of control, at least over their attitude if not the situation. They see themselves as having choice in their lives and as having freedom do choose. There is greater awareness of alternatives. Meaning is accompanied by what is commonly referred to in Psychology as "internal locus of control." Those people expressing higher degrees of meaning seem to act upon a situation rather than seeing a situation as acting upon them. They are proactive rather than reactive.

The Paradox of Gain Through Loss, Self-Transcendence and Self-Concept. This is most clearly exemplified by Lynn (Subject 3), who describes "the ultimate risk in finding meaning" as death. For those individuals who express high meaning there is a sense of going beyond, of losing themselves while at the same time experiencing a greater sense of who they are. It is a focus outward rather than a self-absorption, a reaching out beyond what an individual sees as uniquely "me." Frankl refers to this phenomenon as self-transcendence. There is a paradox operative in self-transcendence. Individuals who express experiencing meaning have a greater sense of who they are which seemingly comes not from direct self-reflection and introspection so much as from increased awareness of what is important through work, relationships and other involvements.

Self-esteem appears to be an important factor in self-transcendence. Those who have high self-esteem appear more likely to be involved with life rather than withdrawn. As Heather (Subject 2) says, the more peaceful and centered she feels, the more involved she feels. Diane (Subject 8), who experiences a high degree of meaning through various avenues, likes herself and appears confident and self-assured. This high self-esteem seems to enable her to be more involved with her work, relationships and other areas from which she experiences meaning. This is in contrast to the first few subjects who appear more withdrawn and isolated, and also as lower in self-esteem. Early life experiences are identified by some subjects as having an impact on their self-esteem and willingness to take risks.

This willingness and ability to change one's self-concept through openness to various life experiences is related to the previously-discussed themes of control and support systems. It is evident in the case studies that strong support systems through family, close friends and romantic involvement appear to contribute to how a person feels about himself. Also, it makes sense that the better the person feels about himself, the more internal locus of control will be experienced and the more freedom of choice will be perceived. For the individuals in this study, those who have higher levels of self-esteem seem better able to risk "losing" themselves by focusing outward with greater involvment. This increased involvement leads to both increased self-identity and meaning.

Levels of Meaning. Results of this study lead us to entertain the possibility that there are levels of meaning. Among the individuals who say they experience high degrees of meaning, there may be qualitative differences between their experience of "meaning." It appears that there are differences in the depth of meaning reported by individuals. Some of the participants appear to experience meaning either because they have not been exposed to crisis, have been insensitive to or in some way insulated from crises that have been present in their lives. Two different qualities of meaning begin to emerge. The first appears more superficial and based on an optimism coming from lack of emotional disruption. The second type of meaning seems to have more depth. It has a quality of sensitivity and awareness coming from the personal experience of moving through emotional disruption and making some sense of it, or utilizing it as a vehicle for a deepened sense of meaning.

Levels of Sensitivity. Frankl (1963) alludes to the idea that not everyone can achieve the same level of meaning. He contrasts how under the most difficult situations man may be "brave, dignified and unselfish" or he may "forget his human dignity and become no more than an animal" (Frankl, 1963, p. 107). Frankl goes on to say that "It is true that only a few people are capable of reaching such high standards" (p. 107). Of particular interest to this inquiry is why some individuals appear to experience deeper levels of meaning than others. Perhaps, as is implied in Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration (1964), not all people have the same potential to derive meaning from any situation. Dabrowski (1964) says that people differ in their level of emotional, physical and intellectual sensitivity. Depending on a person's level of sensitivity a crisis may have little or not impact. But sensitivity alone is clearly inadequate to see a person through crisis to a deepened sense of meaning. Of the individuals interviewed it is clear that some have experienced crisis on a deep, personal level, but that some of these same people also live in what they describe as a state of meaninglessness.

A theme related to emotional sensitivity is that of presence of affect. Individuals who see themselves as experiencing meaning tend to have more awareness of and are better able to express their feelings. Meaning appears to be accompanied by a higher degree of affect whereas meaninglessness appears to be associated more with emotional denial and detachment.

It appears that sensitivity, including personal responsibility and awareness of choice, must be accompanied by external support. It may be that because people differ in their capacities for sensitivity, responsibility and intimacy that they also differ in their capacity for experiencing meaning.

Conclusion

It can be hypothesized on the basis of the present study that the experience of a deepened sense of meaning relates to the internal and external resources available to an individual. Inner resources such as sensitivity, personal responsibility and internal locus of control, and awareness of choice, and external resources, especially the degree of intimacy and presence of support systems, appear to be important factors in how a person experiences deepened meaning. Depending on their resources, it may be that not all people are capable of experiencing meaning to the same degree or on the same level.

It appears that given sufficient internal and external resources (what is sufficient being highly individual and relative to the situation), the experience of crisis can lead to a deeper quality of meaning than is experienced by individuals who have had a life free from disruption. People who have had the inner strength and outer support to move through crises seem to have sharpened their sensitivity. They have a deeper, more profound (as opposed to superficial) experience of their own highly personal and unique life meaning.

This is not to say that some individuals cannot experience deepened meaning without crisis. However, crisis has clearly provided the opportunity for some of the participants in this study to deepen their experience of meaning. The relationship between meaning and crisis is highly individual; however, crisis can be a catalyst for a deepened sense of meaning depending on apparently important contributing factors such as sensitivity, self-concept and self-transcendence, responsibility, awareness of choice and availability and use of support systems.

Implications for Counselling

The question of the relationship between meaning and crisis is an important one for counsellors. Counsellors are often called upon to respond to crisis situations, and have first-hand opportunities to view the meaninglessness experienced by many people who walk through their doors looking for help. This study lends validity to common counselling practices and also raises important questions.

First we must ask if we can counsel for meaning? Assuming we can, then we must ask how best to enhance and deepen a person's experience of meaning through the counselling process? Is crisis essential to the experience of meaning? If a counsellor assumes it is, and uses approaches to create crises in the therapist's office, then careful attention must be given to the conditions most conducive to a positive deepened sense of meaning. If a therapist is skillful at assisting a client to use crises to deepen meaning, he will also keep in mind factors identified in this study such as high self-esteem, an internal sense of control and responsibility, the presence and utilization of support systems and the extent to which individuals can transcend themselves through involvement in such areas as work and relationships. These are all conditions which therapists can help to create. Educational and psychological literature provide ample approaches and suggestions on how this can be accomplished.

There are also many other ways in which counsellors can help individuals to experience increased meaning in their lives. In a crisis situation, as emphasized in crisis literature and confirmed by participants in this study, it is important to ensure that a person in crisis has support. Counsellors can help to build upon, strengthen and even create resources. It is important to help clients develop relationship skills, strengthen present support systems and build new ones. If support is lacking, the counsellor can connect the person with at least temporary support systems by making referrals and enlisting the involvement of available resources such as other professionals, lay counsellors and other volunteers, and family members and friends of the person in crisis.

Counsellors may also help clients toward meaning by working to increase their awareness of choice, freedom to choose and their responsibility for their choices. Psychologists commonly refer to this as increasing one's internal locus of control. The use of simple communication techniques such as the use of "I" messages are helpful in working toward this increased sense of control. Any techniques which assist an individual to see the ongoing choices in his or her life, the alternatives that exist and the responsibility for whatever choice is made may help to increase the person's experience of meaning. Reframing is an example of one technique that can help a person to be aware of existing choices, even if the only remaining choice is to choose one's attitude toward the situation at hand.

As counsellors we must also develop sensitivity to the philosophical question of freedom of choice and its relevance to this inquiry. The author believes, as does Frankl, that individuals are free to choose their attitude toward circumstances. But the pragmatic truth regarding life style issues is that freedom of choice for many people is freedom within constraints. Internal locus of control and awareness of choice appears related to the ability to experience a deepened sense of meaning through crisis. However, therapists must be sensitive to the fact that for certain individuals there exists fewer alternatives than for some others. In these situations, is it helpful for the therapist to increase a person's awareness of choice, especially if none of the existent choices are pleasant and the opportunities are limited?

Because meaning tends to be defined in terms of purpose and working toward goals, counsellors might help clients achieve increased life meaning by utilizing values clarification, life-planning and goal-setting approaches.

Many approaches to therapy, especially those with existential orientations that acknowledge the freedom to choose and responsibility for choice as important to the therapeutic process, emphasize the importance of helping people to face and act upon their responsibility. To what or to whom individuals see themselves as responsible is a matter of personal choice, however the primary task of the therapist in helping an individual toward increased meaning is bringing into awareness the fact that this choice exists.

The specific techniques a counsellor uses to help a client toward increased meaning is a matter of personal preference and individual style. Perhaps more important than techniques are the counsellor's beliefs and attitudes regarding the relationship between meaning and crisis. The counsellor's approach and his or her effectiveness are influenced by the beliefs he or she holds. In this vein, counsellors are challenged to become aware of their own personal definition and experience of meaning and crisis, and to reflect upon the relationship between the two within their own life contexts.

We must be careful not to encourage individuals toward a deepened sense of meaning as defined only by ourselves or by society. The task must be one rather of becoming aware of and able to articulate our own values and their similarity or divergence from those of society, so that we may be careful not to unconsciously indoctrinate clients to our own preconceived view of the world. Rather, we must encourage the people we work with to choose their own beliefs, to experience their own meaning and to act responsibly from this base of awareness. This is most likely to happen if one maintains a questioning stance, challenging rather than growing complacent, about the philosophical assumptions and therapeutic biases upon which we work with people.

This study lends validity to therapeutic approaches that incorporate both external and intrapsychic factors. Counsellors may help clients experience increased meaning by focusing on their support systems, ability for self-transcendence and related level of self-esteem, sense of control and awareness of choice, and sensitivity.

Implications for Research

The present study raises many questions, both philosophical and psychological, on the relationship between crisis and a deepened sense of meaning.

Because the conclusions drawn from this study cannot be generalized beyond the 10 individual cases, it would be useful to investigate the extent to which the emergent themes appear related to experienced meaning in a larger population. Although beyond the scope of the present study, it would also be interesting to look at how sex differences, cultural and educational differences might affect the relationship between crisis and a deepened sense of meaning. Life-span developmental stage may be another factor related to a deepened sense of meaning and crisis. Perhaps individuals' capacities for handling crises are relative to their age and developmental stage.

Another area that might be considered is the philosophical assumptions and societal values underlying the thesis. Is the concept of meaning a class phenomenon? How do social expectations and values influence individuals' experience of meaning and crisis? What support is there for the thesis that there are levels of meaning? Must an individual be aware of meaning in order to experience it? To what extent is meaning the product of current social trends and expectations? There is a need, not only in Psychology, but in all disciplines to challenge concepts intrinsic to each, and for each discipline to be more than a mere reflection of societal values.

Although this study has compared the experience of individuals who express varying degrees of meaning and meaninglessness, an area it has not emphasized is the crushing side of crisis. Some individuals clearly do not move through crises. Suicide victims and some patients in mental hospitals are testimony to this fact. It may be useful to study the destructive side of crisis in order to isolate variables related to why some individuals do not survive crises.

Although our institutions are often witness to how crisis has broken people, life experience also shows that some individuals, as is evident in this study, come through crisis relatively unaffected or with a deepened sense of meaning. Perhaps by studying healthy individuals, that is, individuals who have survived crises, we may learn more about how to strengthen, early in the developmental process, the resources that appear helpful in crisis. In this way, crisis intervention may be preventative.

There is also a need for more studies to emphasize the specificity and uniqueness of people. Attempts to quantify human behaviour can end in a reductionistic view of man and overlook important information if not used in tandem with more descriptive, phenomenological approaches.

This thesis was not a study of happiness. How is meaning different from happiness? Are people who experience meaning happier than those who experience less meaning? Perhaps a deepened sense of meaning sharpens one's sensitivity to the dark, painful side of life as well as to its joys. Why should therapists help individuals toward a deepened sense of meaning if it may involve disrupting their relatively easy existence and comfortable picture of the world? Is a deepened sense of meaning necessarily positive? These are important questions to consider.

It would be interesting to consider the data in the present study through particular schools of thought in psychology and philosophy. Their different perspectives would undoubtedly further illuminate and challenge the present findings.

The study of deepened meaning and crisis is rich with thoughts and questions crossing several disciplines and inviting many inquiries worthy of investigation.

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APPENDIX A

SCHEDULE OF RECENT EXPERIENCE (SRE)

SCHEDULE OF RECENT EXPERIENCE (SRE)

CARD NO. _1_ 1
GROUP NO. ___ ___ 2 3
DATE ___________ ___ ___ 4 5
ID NO. ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ 6 7 8 9 10

NAME ______________________ ADDRESS ______________________
AGE ___ 11 12 SEX: 13 Male ___ Female ___ ______________________
MARITAL STATUS: 14 Married ___ Divorced ___ Separated ___ Widowed ___ Never married ___
EDUCATION: 15 Grade school ___ High school ___ Trade school ___ College ___ Advanced degree ___

INSTRUCTIONS:

For each life event item listed below please do the following:

> Think back on the event and decide if it happened to you and when it happened. If the event did happen, indicate the *number of times* it happened by placing a number in each of the appropriate time periods. The columns are as follows:

	0-12 months ago	1-2 years ago	2-5 years ago	5+ years ago
	0–6 mo ago	6 mo–1 yr ago	1–2 yrs ago	2–3 yrs ago
1. A lot more or a lot less troubles with the boss.	16	17	18	19
2. A major change in sleeping habits (sleeping a lot more or a lot less, or change in part of day when asleep).	20	21	22	23
3. A major change in eating habits (a lot more or a lot less food intake, or very different meal hours or surroundings).	24	25	26	27
4. A revision of personal habits (dress, manners, associations, etc.)	28	29	30	31
5. A major change in your usual type and/or amount of recreation.	32	33	34	35
6. A major change in your social activities (e.g., clubs, dancing, movies, visiting, etc.).	36	37	38	39
7. A major change in church activities (e.g., a lot more or a lot less than usual).	40	41	42	43
8. A major change in number of family-get-togethers (e.g., a lot more or a lot less than usual).	44	45	46	47
9. A major change in financial state (e.g., a lot worse off or a lot better off than usual).	48	49	50	51
10. In-law troubles.	52	53	54	55
11. A major change in the number of arguments with spouse (e.g., either a lot more or a lot less than usual regarding child-rearing, personal habits, etc.).	56	57	58	59
12. Sexual difficulties.	60	61	62	63

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	0-12 mo ago XXX mo ago	1-2 yrs ago XXXX- 1 yr ago	2-5 yrs ago XXX yrs ago	5+ yrs agp XXXX yrs ago
13. Major personal injury or illness.	____ 64	____ 65	____ 66	____ 67
14. Death of a close family member (other than spouse).	____ 68	____ 69	____ 70	____ 71
15. Death of spouse.	____ 72	____ 73	____ 74	____ 75
16. Death of a close friend.	____ 76	____ 77	____ 78	____ 79

END CARD 1

CARD NO. 2
REPEAT
COL. 1-10

17. Gaining a new family member (e.g., through birth, adoption, oldster moving in, etc.).	____ 11	____ 12	____ 13	____ 14
18. Major change in the health or behavior of a family member.	____ 15	____ 16	____ 17	____ 18
19. Change in residence.	____ 19	____ 20	____ 21	____ 22
20. Detention in jail or other institution.	____ 23	____ 24	____ 25	____ 26
21. Minor violations of the law (e.g., traffic tickets, jaywalking, disturbing the peace, etc.).	____ 27	____ 28	____ 29	____ 30
22. Major business readjustment (e.g., merger, reorganization, bankruptcy, etc.).	____ 31	____ 32	____ 33	____ 34
23. Marriage.	____ 35	____ 36	____ 37	____ 38
24. Divorce.	____ 39	____ 40	____ 41	____ 42
25. Marital separation from spouse.	____ 43	____ 44	____ 45	____ 46
26. Outstanding personal achievement.	____ 47	____ 48	____ 49	____ 50
27. Son or daughter leaving home (e.g., marriage, attending college, etc.).	____ 51	____ 52	____ 53	____ 54
28. Retirement from work.	____ 55	____ 56	____ 57	____ 58
29. Major change in working hours or conditions.	____ 59	____ 60	____ 61	____ 62
30. Major change in responsibilities at work (e.g., promotion, demotion, lateral transfer).	____ 63	____ 64	____ 65	____ 66
31. Being fired from work.	____ 67	____ 68	____ 69	____ 70
32. Major change in living conditions (e.g., building a new home, remodeling, deterioration of home or neighborhood).	____ 71	____ 72	____ 73	____ 74
33. Wife beginning or ceasing work outside the home.	____ 75	____ 76	____ 77	____ 78

END CARD 2

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	0-12 mo ago 0–6 mo ago	1-2 yrs ago 6 mo–1 yr ago	2-5 yrs ago 1–2 yrs ago	5+ yrs ago 2–3 yrs ago	CARD NO. 3 REPEAT COL. [illegible]
34. Taking out a mortgage or loan for a major purchase (e.g., purchasing a home, business, etc.).	___	___	___	___	
35. Taking out a mortgage or loan for a lesser purchase (e.g., purchasing a car, TV, freezer, etc.).	___	___	___	___	
36. Foreclosure on a mortgage or loan.	___	___	___	___	
37. Vacation.	___	___	___	___	
38. Changing to a new school.	___	___	___	___	
39. Changing to a different line of work.	___	___	___	___	
40. Beginning or ceasing formal schooling.	___	___	___	___	
41. Marital reconciliation with mate.	___	___	___	___	
42. Pregnancy.	___	___	___	___	

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APPENDIX B

THE PURPOSE IN LIFE TEST (PIL)

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APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW FORMAT

INTERVIEW FORMAT

As you know, I'm interested in how change and disruption affect people and their view of what is important in life. I'm doing this study so that I can learn more about the kinds of approaches that are helpful to people in counselling, and this is why I want to talk with you about some of your life experiences in this area. If you have any questions as we go along, please stop me and ask for clarification. Some questions may fit more for you than others.

Family Background:

Age:

Educational Background:

Work History:

Marital Status:

Religious Affiliation: (active or inactive)

When people talk about experiencing meaning and purpose in their lives it can mean different things. What do you think others mean when they speak of "meaning in life?"

How would you define the term "meaning in life?"

What is meaningful for you in your life? In other words, how do you experience meaning?

How do you feel when you experience meaning as compared to when you don't?

How do you act when you experience meaning as compared to when you don't?

How do you think when you experience meaning as compared to when you don't?

Do you experience any physical sensations when you experience meaning as compared to when you don't?

How would you describe how you came to experience meaning? (What has contributed to your finding of meaning?)

Compared to others, have you experienced a lot of change in your life? On a scale of 1 to 9, with 5 being average, where would you rate yourself compared to others your age on the amount of change you have experienced?

What has had the most impact on your life? Please elaborate.

What has been or is currently most disruptive in your life to date? Please elaborate.

How did you experience this disruption, for example, as pleasant or unpleasant? Tell me more.

What effects did this disruption have on you?

I'm going to move now to a definition question. The word "crisis" means different things to different people. How would you define a crisis?

Have you had any of what you would call crises in your life? Please identify the ones that come to mind.

How long did this crisis (or these crises) last?

Are you experiencing a crisis of any kind in your life at present?

I'd like to talk in more detail about what each of these crises was like for you. How did you handle the crisis? (What did you do?)

How did you feel during the crisis?

Do you recall experiencing any physical sensations during the crisis?

What were your thoughts during the crisis?

Have you changed as a result of any of the crises you have described to me?

If yes, how have you changed?

Do you think these changes would have occurred had you not experienced the crisis (or crises)?

What was most helpful to you during times of crisis?

What was least helpful to you during times of crisis?

What might have been more helpful?

Do you see a distinction between crisis and suffering? Please elaborate.

Has suffering been involved in all of what you have experienced as crisis?

Would you say that you have experienced suffering in your life as compared to most people? Where would you place yourself on a scale of 1 to 9 with 5 being average?

If you could live your life over again in any way what would you change if anything?

I'm interested in what this interview was like for you? Any further comments?